

Sermon outline and notes:

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## Mark 8:1-10, 13-21 “Curing the Spiritual Blahs”

Intro. As we move into chapter 8 the Lord is continuing His ministry outside of Galilee. When He was in southern Lebanon with His disciples He was better able to get away from the crowds, and spend time alone with His disciples. The Lord knew that He would depend upon these disciples to carry on His work after He returned back to heaven. He would soon be teaching them the lesson of the cross, for Himself, and for His disciples. For example, in v.31 he said, “He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.” Then in v.34 He said to all His followers, “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.” So the disciples needed to be spiritually alert and prepared for this important teaching. But you will observe from this text of Scripture that they were not ready to receive this lesson. They were spiritually dull and spiritually blind, even after being with Jesus for about 2 years! They had the spiritual blahs; they just weren’t with it spiritually.

Have you ever been like that? Do you ever hear a Bible message, and it doesn’t seem to penetrate your heart & mind? Well this morning we are going to see what Jesus did to get these disciples out of their spiritual blahs. They were like a derailed train that just couldn’t make progress. Jesus needed to get them on track spiritually so that they could make some real progress in their spiritual lives. Are you growing in your spiritual life, or are you in a rut spiritually? Well let’s see how Jesus gets these disciples ready for spiritual leadership. First of all, we see:

### I. JESUS REFRESHES THE MULTITUDE

The story in the first 9 verses gives the background for the teaching that follows. It also illustrates what Jesus can do for you both materially & spiritually. When you are hungry, running on empty, Jesus can fill you with His provisions.

Now let’s see why Jesus refreshed the multitude as we consider:

A. The Hunger of the Multitude – Even though at this time Jesus wanted to get away from the multitudes to spend time with His disciples, still multitudes of people managed to find Him. They heard that Jesus could meet their needs, and so they traveled from miles around to be with Him. Why did they come? Well I believe they were hungry:

1. For Spiritual Food – In vv.1-2 we see that a multitude of people had come out to hear Jesus preach & teach. While quite a few may have been there to satisfy curiosity, I’m sure many others were there to hear the Word of God. The reason I say that is according to v.2, they had been with Jesus for 3 days. Those who were miles from their homes probably stayed with Jesus both day & night. It must have been like an old fashioned camp meeting, and Jesus must have some preacher! Can you imagine people staying around that long to hear a preacher that long? Why today, many people get bothered when a preacher goes past 12:00 just a little bit! So magnetic was the presence of Jesus, so marvelous was He in word and deed, that those who surrounded Him regarded it to be almost impossible to leave.

They were not only hungry for spiritual food, but also:

2. For Physical Food – As we see from vv.1-3, the multitude evidently had followed Jesus into a wilderness (v.4b) which was convenient for teaching but not readily accessible to supplies. These many people had been with Jesus for three days and that whatever food they may have had with them upon arrival was now completely used up. V.1 says that the multitude had “nothing to eat.” If under these circumstances they should simply be dismissed, they would not even be able to reach home, but at least some would collapse on the way from lack of food. This all the more because some, as Mark reports, had come “from afar.” (Now where I come from, if they say they had come from a far, they may be saying that they came from a fire!)

I wonder if anyone here today feels physically or spiritually run down. You feel like your tank is empty, and you are just barely making it? Well I have good news for you. Notice next of all:

B. The Compassion of Jesus – Jesus said in v.2, “I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat.” Notice that Jesus had compassion on the multitude. He identified with their need. Had He not experienced for Himself the pangs of hunger? (See Matt. 4:2).

When you have a need, when you are running on empty & barely making it in your physical or spiritual life, I want you to know that Jesus cares. Heb. 4:15 says, “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses....” Then v.16 says, “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” I do not know what your need is today, but the Lord is able to meet your need.

Now Jesus wants to meet the need of the multitude through His disciples. So notice next of all:

C. The Call to the Disciples to Act – In says in v.1, “In those days, the multitude being very great and having nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples to Him....” Now in vv.1-2 we see that we should:

1. Consider the Need - The Lord called His disciples to Himself & told them the multitude didn’t have anything to eat. What is so strikingly evident is that Jesus is not only Himself the Great Sympathizer but also wants the disciples to share His compassion. The reason why He now turns to them is not that He Himself is at a loss what to do. The Master addresses His disciples in order to awaken them to their responsibility. He wants them to think about the needs of the people all around them.

Let us strive to make Jesus our pattern. Let us be kind and compassionate to everyone. Right now there is a critical need for the people in Haiti. The Lord does not want us to ignore the needs of those people, but consider the need & have compassion on them, and do something to help them. Without compassion can a person be a true follower of Christ?

2. Consider How to Meet the Need – The disciples were thinking about this, but they immediately diverted responsibility from themselves, saying that nothing could be done. They ask Jesus in v.4, “How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?” These guys were not very sharp! What were they thinking! Yet the least these men could and should have done was to beg the Master to repeat what He had done before, and then to inform the crowd that help was on the way. Yet the disciples had forgotten about the earlier miracle of the feeding of the 5000. It is amazing how we forget about past provisions from the Lord when we are faced with a new crisis. All the disciples could see was the problem, not the solution in Jesus Christ.

So Jesus seeks to get His disciples thinking. He says in v.5, “How many loaves do you have?” He knew the answer. And when they said, “Seven,” that should have sparked their memory

of the time when Jesus asked the same question and they said, “Five.” He wanted to remind them that little is much in the hands of the Son of God. Yet they focused on how little they had, but they should have considered what Jesus could do with what little they had. They just weren’t with it spiritually.

Don’t focus on what little you have, but consider what God can do with your abilities and resources, though they are small. I say that, for notice next of all:

D. The Provision of God – When you are running on empty, when you are spiritually down, God can restore your soul (Psa. 23:3). Notice what Jesus does to meet the need of the multitude:

1. He Gives Thanks for What They Had - Notice in the middle of v.6 that once again Jesus “gave thanks.” I believe it is important to be thankful for what you have. Before you ask God for more than you have, be sure that you first give thanks for what you *do* have.

Notice also that Jesus gave thanks publicly. Do you thank God for your meals out in public? Jesus did. Are you ashamed to pray in public? [Share my first experiences of doing this?] Why should you be ashamed to thank the Lord? This ungodly, worldly crowd doesn’t seem to mind speaking profanity out loud in public places!

2. He Broke & Multiplied the Food – After taking the 7 loaves & giving thanks, we read in v.6 that the Lord “broke them.” As He does so, the bread never runs out. As He breaks off a piece, it is replaced somehow with more bread. As we in v.7, He must have done the same thing with a few small fish that He was given. As a result:

3. He Provided Abundantly! – In v.8 we read, “So they ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets of leftover fragments.” He doesn’t give them just a snack; He gives them a full dinner. I say that because they had 7 “large baskets” of fragments left over. Note that twelve baskets of broken pieces were picked up in connection with the feeding of the five thousand. But that doesn’t mean that they had fewer leftovers in our story today. That’s because a different Greek word was used for “baskets” in this story. Here the word refers to large baskets (*spuris*). In fact, in Acts 9:25 we find the same word used of a similar basket or hamper that was large enough to hold Paul and lower him from the wall!

Furthermore, we have another indication of the abundant supply of the Lord. Notice from v.9 that there were about 4,000 who were fed! In fact, according to Matthew’s account (Mt. 15:38), that 4,000 number only included the men. No doubt some women & children were present as well. So the actual number could have been twice that much or more.

The one who had compassion on the hungry crowd in the desert and met their need—He is still alive. How much more will He meet the need of those who trust Him? And when you come to Jesus, you will find an inexhaustible supply for your every need. He can meet your physical needs, and He can meet your spiritual needs. We must never allow ourselves to doubt Christ's power to supply the spiritual needs of all His people. Jesus said in John 10:10, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”

## II. JESUS REBUKES THE DISCIPLES

We have already seen evidences of the spiritual dullness of the disciples. Now it gets even worse! As we see in vv.11-13, the Pharisees demanded that Jesus show them a sign from heaven, but Jesus refused. He had already given all the signs & miracles that they needed. So that incident lead to:

A. The Warning of Jesus - Jesus warned them in v.15, "Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." Jesus does not say both "take heed" & "beware" in the same sentence very often. In fact, I found only one other occurrence (Matthew 18:10). So what He said here was very important. They were to be very diligent in looking out for the danger He was warning about. The main lesson had to do with leaven (yeast). In the Bible, leaven is consistently a symbol of evil. Each Passover season, the Jews had to remove all leaven from their dwellings (Ex. 12:18-20), and leaven was not allowed with the offerings (Ex.23:18; 34:25). Evil, like leaven, is small and hidden, but it spreads and soon infects the whole. Paul had this in mind when he warned in 1 Cor. 5:6, "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?" The Bible also uses leaven as a picture of false doctrine (Gal. 5:1-9). That's what Jesus had in mind here. He used this word in the unfavorable sense of evil teaching, considered as a very powerful, increasingly corrupting influence. Notice each of the following types of leaven:

1. The Leaven of the Pharisees - This represents legalism and traditionalism. They made religion a matter of nothing more than living by a set of man-made rules. Christianity is not being inhibited by a set of rules, but being inhabited by the Ruler, Jesus Christ. If you want to be weak spiritually, then live by the doctrine of legalism. Then He also warned of:

2. The Leaven of Herod - The Herodians were a worldly group who catered to Herod, and accepted the Roman way of life. They thought their material well-being was best served by supporting Herod & Rome.

Are you worldly & materialistic in your approach to live? There are plenty of preachers today who preach the gospel of material prosperity. Listen, worldly, materialistic living will sap your spiritual strength. We are to seek God first in our lives (Mt. 6:33), and leave it up to Him how much material wealth He will bestow upon us.

Matthew's account adds that He also warned of

3. The Leaven of the Sadducees - They were the liberals of their day (cf. Mark 12:18). They didn't believe in the supernatural. They didn't believe in the power of God at work in the lives of people. Leaven is the process of making something taste good to the natural man. Isn't a soft yeast roll a whole lot better than hard, unleavened bread? Even so, liberalism tries to make Christianity acceptable to unbelievers. God pity the liberal church. The reason Mark's account leaves out the leaven of the Sadducees is probably because the leaven of Herod & the leaven of the Sadducees are almost one and the same. The Sadducees were the party to which the high priests, etc. generally belonged. The priestly oligarchy was for its very existence and continuity dependent upon the favor of the Herods. Rejecting both the resurrection of the body and the immortality of the soul, their interests were absorbed in the here and now. They were "worldly," and in this respect resembled Herod and his supporters.

If any of this false teaching got into the hearts and minds of the disciples, it would infect them and pollute the truth Jesus had given them to proclaim about Himself and His kingdom. That is why Jesus said, "Look out!" and "Be on your guard against." These imperatives are synonyms, both meaning to watch & look for danger. The present tense means, "Keep on looking out."

“Always be on your guard against.” Some people say that doctrine doesn’t matter. But Jesus says that it does matter very much! Our Lord did not often say “Beware!” but when He did it was important! The Twelve needed this warning. In spite of their daily association with Jesus, they constantly were in danger of paying too much attention to the views of the opposition.

The assaults of persecution from without have never done half so much harm to the church as the rise of false doctrines within. Let us not trifle with a little false doctrine, for it can grow & spread into destructive heresy.

B. Their Problem in Understanding Spiritual Truth –Look at vv.14-16, “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.’ And they reasoned among themselves, saying, ‘It is because we have no bread.’” The disciples totally misunderstood what Jesus was talking about. Their minds were dull, their hearts were hard, their spiritual eyes were blind, and their spiritual ears were deaf. They quickly ascribed a literal meaning to “yeast”, and probably concluded that in light of the fact that they did not have enough bread, the Master was forbidding them to accept bread from Pharisees and from people associated with Herod. Yet why worry about a shortage of bread when you have Jesus in the boat with you? Do you wonder how the Lord put up with the disciples? I have another question. Do you wonder how the Lord puts up with you and me?

As we have already discussed, the disciples were slow learners of spiritual truth. While they were in the boat, Jesus was discussing one thing, but the disciples thought He was discussing something else. They weren’t on the same wave length, so to speak. Jesus was thinking about spiritual things, and the disciples were thinking about earthly things, like the fact that they only had one loaf of bread.

It was like the young guy who was over at his girlfriend’s house. It was a summer evening in the countryside, and they were swinging on the porch swing. It was a romantic night. The crickets were chirping, and you could hear the leaves blowing gently in the wind. Down in the valley was a country church, and the church choir was rehearsing. The young man was a nature lover, but the girlfriend was a music lover. He was tuned in to the crickets, and she was tuned in to the singing. She said, “Oh isn’t that lovely?” He said, “Oh, yes it is.” He then said, “They tell me that they make that sound by rubbing their hind legs together!” They weren’t talking about the same thing, I hope! Even so, Jesus & His disciples weren’t on the same wave length.

Have you ever been there in your spiritual life? You come to church. The preacher or S.S. teacher is excited about spiritual truth, but your mind is on worldly concerns, & you are just not getting it? So I conclude with:

C. The Solution - Now these disciples clearly had a spiritual problem. They were spiritually immature, and slow to learn. They were spiritually flat. When you find that is true in your own life, let me suggest some steps you should take:

1. Get into the Word of God and Reflect Upon God’s Truth - Here’s the problem they needed to correct. Jesus asked them in v.17, “Do you not yet perceive nor understand?” So to help them, beginning in v.17 Jesus asked a series of 9 questions, to get them thinking, and to lead them into a proper understanding of what He is trying to teach them.

When you get to be a little dull spiritually, you need to get into the Word of God, and spend time thinking and reflecting upon what God wants to say to you. We need to pray & ask God to

help us understand His Word. The Word of God is the Bread of Life. We are to feed on the Bible. The words and works of Jesus must be pondered and taken to heart.

2. Take a Look at Your Heart - In the last of v.17 Jesus said, “Is your heart still hardened?” Sometimes we can know something intellectually, but the truth is not affecting our lives, because our hearts have become hard. Is your heart hard?

There are times when you come to a worship service, and you just don’t get anything out of it. Perhaps the sermon just doesn’t connect with you. At times it may be the preacher just had a bad day. But at times it may be due to the condition of your own heart. One way we get a hardened heart is by continuing in willful disobedience. Or we just grow cold in our love for the Lord. Do you love Jesus more today, than in the past? Watch out for a hardened heart!

3. Remember What You Have Learned & Experienced – In the last of v.18 Jesus said, “And do you not remember?” Evidently they failed to remember what Jesus did when He fed the 5,000.

So we should remember what Jesus has done in the past. God’s people often have a tendency to forget His blessings (Ps. 103:1-2). He meets our needs, but then when the next problem arises, we complain or become frightened. When a new emergency arises, we find ourselves neophytes; that is, it is all brand new to us again. Had they completely forgotten the previous miracle? How many times have we forgotten the mercies of the Lord? We need to remind ourselves that Jesus Christ is still the same and has the solution to every problem. All we need do is trust Him, give Him our all, and obey. Do you remember when you first met Jesus? Do you remember the thrill of having your sins forgiven? Take time to reflect on what Christ has done for you.

Conclusion: Now I call upon you to respond to the Word of God. There are probably some here today who haven’t yet trusted in Christ as Savior. Don’t be like the Pharisees, and wait until God gives you some sign from heaven. Christ has already done many miracles, and they have been faithfully reported by eyewitnesses. You have all the evidence you need. Repent of your sins and trust in Christ as your Savior.

Most here today are already Christians. Do you have a case of the spiritual blahs? Would you acknowledge that you are not where you need to be spiritually? Then I call upon you to remember the way things used to be between you and God, and renew your walk with Him today. Get back to your daily prayer times. Get back into His Word with eagerness, passion, & understanding. Get back to serving the Lord like you used to.

Sources: William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); J.C. Ryle (1816-1900), *Mark: Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993); Jerry Vines (notes from sermon tape of 10/23/83); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Diligent: Mark* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1987). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

See sources on Mt. 15:32-16:12.

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