



Mark 8:1-21 home group questions

We began our time together by asking why Mark would record a miracle so similar to the feeding of the 5000 in Mark 6v30-44?

The miracle: Jesus compassionately and abundantly provides for his people (v1-9)

This is the third in a sequence of three miracles performed in Gentile territory (from 7v24 – 8v9). It is worth noting that Jesus did exactly the same thing in 8v1-9 as in chapter 6, but for a very different people – the Gentiles, the outsiders to God's kingdom.

We also noticed the greater focus on Jesus' compassion (see v2-3), and especially his compassion for a people who needed **feeding**. We noted the difference in Jesus' method, breaking and distributing the bread before the fish. Perhaps Jesus wanted to focus our attention on the bread because he wanted us to look forward to the Last Supper, and indeed to the cross, when the bread of life himself would be broken.

God, in his great compassion, saw us when we were weak, hungry and hopeless, and provided bread that will satisfy us forever – Jesus' body.

Response 1: The Pharisees for whom it will never be enough (v10-13)

The Pharisees come to test and discredit Jesus, demanding a sign. It would seem a reasonable request were it not for everything Mark has already recorded for us! But we noted that as the Pharisees pull no punches with Jesus, Jesus pulls no punches with them. The Pharisees, and the "generation" they represent, will have no more signs (v12). And then Jesus left them (v13) – he turned away from those who had turned away from him.

God longs for everyone to follow him (see 1 Tim 2:3-4, Matt 11:28), but he will not pursue people forever. Jesus does not run after people like the Pharisees here, or the rich young ruler in Mark 10, begging them to give him another chance.

Response 2: The disciples who still don't understand (v14-21)

We breathe a sigh of relief as we get back to the disciples. But Jesus has stern words for them too. They're worried about their lack of a picnic lunch, but Jesus has much bigger worries for them, as we see in his eight questions.

It would appear that these disciples were little better than the Pharisees. No more able to understand and see Jesus for who he is. What a shock this must have been for Jesus' first hearers! If this is the condition of the disciples, what hope is there for the rest of us?

But notice that, unlike the Pharisees, the disciples do want to understand. Their problem is ignorance, not unbelief. And we know from later in the Bible the incredible faith God granted these men. There is hope for the disciples!

They need the miracles of 7v31-37 and 8v22-26 – miracles in which Jesus opens deaf ears and blind eyes. They need the “new hearts” God promises in Ezekiel 36v26-28. And so do we.

Questions

- Why does Mark record another miracle, in 8v1-9, that is so similar to the miracle he recorded in 6v30-44? What does he want us to take from this second miracle?
- What is similar and what is different about the two “feeding” accounts?
- How is the bread Jesus provides for us similar to but so much greater than the loaves he provided for the 4000?
- Why is Jesus so dismissive of the Pharisees' seemingly reasonable request, v11-12?
- What does it mean that Jesus “left” the Pharisees (v13)? Why might that not sit very comfortably for us? How does it affect our view of evangelism and of God?
- How are we tempted to try to control the ways God relates to us? Have you had situations where you wanted God to reveal himself/his word in a particular way and he didn't?
- Why would what happened in the boat (v14-21) have been such a surprise to Mark's first hearers?
- Have we ever had experiences where we've realised how unaware, even complacent, we can be in our often so basic knowledge of God and his word?
- This account finishes with a very difficult question left hanging, unanswered, in the air. What hope is there for the disciples, and for us who follow after?
- Jesus warns the disciples against the “yeast of the Pharisees and Herod”. What are we tempted to feed on instead of or as well as Jesus? Why won't it satisfy us?