

REPEAT LESSONS

Mark 8:1-21

As we open up to the 8th chapter of the book of Mark this morning, I want to see how well you remember a lesson from chapter 6. Just over a month ago, when we were in chapter 6, I showed you guys this picture of an ostrich with virtual reality goggles on. In the commercial, this ostrich ends up with these things on his head and what's playing in these goggles is a 1st person video of flying through the clouds. And the ostrich loves it because he has wings but can't fly. But through this video playing over and over, eventually he sees beyond his limitations and he flies! And at the end of the commercial there were four words. Without looking at your notes, do you remember what they were? It was the title and big lesson of the sermon.

The four words were "Do What You Can't." It's a pretty good paraphrase of Jesus' words to the disciples to feed the 5,000+ crowd, saying, "You give them something to eat." Jesus was telling them to look beyond their limitations and unto Him, the Unlimited One, to feed this large crowd. And that had to be a mind-blowing miracle! Other than the resurrection, it's the only other miracle that all four gospels record. It is one of the craziest miracles where Jesus is just creating this bread from grain that never grew and fish from fish that never swam right in His hands and they're giving it to the crowd. If you were there, if you were one of these disciples, who had to go back and forth with baskets from Jesus to the crowd, over and over, you'd think you wouldn't forget that, right?

Well, the disciples did! Maybe not the instance, but *the spiritual lesson* from it, they forgot. And really, we shouldn't be too hard on that disciples because we're no much different. We're a forgetful bunch of people and quite often, He has to teach us the same old lessons over and over again, even in the most basic spiritual matters. That's why it's important to stay *in* the Word and *under* the Word. We need *constant truth reminders* as we go through this crazy life. I think that's what we see today in our passage today. Now, normally when a pastor starts repeating himself too much, you get a little concerned but that's the whole point of this passage. Some repetition is necessary and good (2 Peter 1:12). **So Jesus is going to teach these disciples and us the some of the same old lessons again through feeding a multitude, but this time, a multitude of Gentiles.**

Let's read Mark 8:1. Jesus, again, was in the Gentile area of Decapolis:

"In those days, when there was again a large crowd and they had nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples and said to them, "I feel compassion for people because they have remained with Me now three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way; and some of them have come from a great distance." And His disciples answered Him, "Where will anyone be able to find enough bread here in this desolate place to satisfy these people?" And He was asking them, "How many loaves do you have?" And they said, "Seven." And He directed the people to sit down on the ground; and taking the seven loaves, He gave thanks and broke them, and started giving them to His disciples to serve to them, and they served them to the people. They also had a few small fish; and after He blessed them, He ordered these to be served as well. And they ate and were satisfied; and they picked up seven large baskets full of what was left over of the broken pieces. About four thousand were there; and He sent them away. And immediately He entered the boat with His disciples and came to the district of Dalmanutha.

The Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, to test Him. Sighing deeply in His spirit, He said, “Why does this generation seek for a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation.” Leaving them, He again embarked and went away to the other side.

And they had forgotten to take bread, and did not have more than one loaf in the boat with them. And He was giving orders to them, saying, “Watch out! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.” They began to discuss with one another the fact that they had no bread. And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? Having eyes, do you not see? And 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 broken pieces you picked up?” They said to Him, “Twelve.” “When I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?” And they said to Him, “Seven.” And He was saying to them, “Do you not yet understand?”

You see what I mean by repeat lessons? Repetition, an old proverb says, is the mother of all knowledge. It’s helpful to think of repetition as wheel tracks or wheel ruts. The more you go over something, the greater it sinks in in your mind. And I think that’s a good thing. You need mental wheel ruts of great spiritual lessons so you don’t forget them. One of those lessons for any interpreter of the Bible is that you start with the context. The context itself, being the greater setting that all of this is in as a book and with where Jesus is at in His ministry, is key to accurately interpreting what is going on. It’s hard to grasp any lessons going on here if the context isn’t first understood.

I. THE CONTEXT: JESUS TAKING THE DISCIPLES ON A GENTILE LESSON-TRIP.

Remember, Jesus and His disciples are sort of on a lesson trip at the moment. It’s less of a mission trip and more of **a lesson trip**. Many of you who have been on mission trips know what that’s like. You went on a mission trip to serve and do the work of the Lord but you came home with unforgettable lessons about life. It changed the way you see the world. And the disciples right now are having their views of the world changed as well and specifically about how receptive the Gentiles will be to Christ and His desire to reach them.

With more oppression and rejection being experienced from the Jewish elite, Jesus is turning more and more to the Gentiles. He has ventured into the surrounding Gentile areas of Tyre and Sidon and now Decapolis. And it’s a big deal so this really informs the entire gospel movement and Great Commission to make disciples of *all nations*. Remember, even by the way He healed the Syrophenician’s daughter and the Roman Centurion’s servant, *from a distance*, says that in Christ, the barrier, or the distance, between Jew and Gentile is broken down. No one is beyond His reach or desire to be saved. So that’s basically what this is all about in the big picture of context.

Last time Jesus fed the multitude it was in a Jewish area but now they’re in a Gentile area feeding the multitude. **The contextual lesson to the disciples** is, “You won’t only be going to Israel, but to the Gentiles too. There’s enough crumbs for the Gentiles to eat and be fully satisfied as well.”

❖ The disciples will be responsible to “nourish” Jew & Gentile with the gospel.

By going to the Gentile areas and doing this, **Jesus is planting the seeds right now of a huge theological shift that is about to begin with the New Covenant** and it’s that God’s program is no longer just a “Come and see” program. Israel was to be distinct from the world by the way she walked with God and God would bless her and people would come and see that – it was a city light on a hill mentality. But with the gospel, it’s **not just “come and see” but “Go and tell”**. Go and

tell people about Jesus and what He has done. Go and share the gospel. Get out and make Christ known where He is not. Our commission is not a minor commission or a small commission but a Great Commission to take the gospel to the entire world (Mt. 28:18-20). And every believer is to be involved in that commission through evangelism and making disciples. **So can I ask you a question? Are you evangelizing and making disciples? Are you discipling anyone?**

Next let's look at miracle itself.

II. THE MIRACLE: JESUS & THE DISCIPLES FEED THE MULTITUDE, AGAIN.
(VV. 1-9)

And I want to underscore again that part about Jesus "*and the disciples*" feed the multitude because like the first time, it's not just Jesus that feeds the multitude. It is Jesus *and the disciples* that feed the multitude. Every other miracle Jesus did, it was by Himself. But these are different and hands on because it's training day. **Jesus is reteaching and retraining them this lesson about *doing what you can't through Him and by depending on Him and His power.*** And it is a lesson that they need reminded of because as a disciple of Jesus Christ this is something you should apply every single day. And because they forgot it already!

When Jesus expresses His concern and compassion for these people who need to eat before they journey back home, they say, "Where will anyone be able to find enough bread here in this desolate place to satisfy these people?" Their response just makes you want to have what Swindoll calls "a face-palm moment." It's so like the disciples and so like us! Since not one of the disciples spoke up and said, "*Hey, remember what happened last time?*" it seems that they collectively forgot.

But Jesus, patient as He is, doesn't rebuke them or chastise them. He just asks them again, "How many loaves do you have?" And this time they have 7 loaves instead of 5 and a few small fish instead of 2. They also have larger baskets. And the crowd is smaller. The locations is different. So it's clearly not the same account. Jesus though, gives thanks and just starts giving bread and fish to the disciples who in turn give it to the people. It seems like He gave them bread first this time and then fish. It reminds me of the Friday night fish nights we had at the local country club as a kid – a small warm loaf of bread first, then the fish.

But let's remind ourselves of the big lessons being taught.

Miracle Lesson 1 - Jesus is God and can sufficiently provide for all your needs.

He is the Creator and Provide and Sustainer of His creation. He cares for everyone, even those who don't care for Him, and provides for everyone. He never runs out of His ability to provide. Jesus is teaching the disciples who He is through this – that He is the infinite Jehovah Jireh.

But secondly, they're also learning that if they're going to serve people as His disciples, they've got to learn to look to Him... that they can't do ministry and serve others without constantly looking to Him and depending on Him. That they are simply channels through which He works. So...

Ministry Lesson 2 – Disciples must constantly depend on or look to Jesus to do ministry.

This is all demonstrated by the way they're **actively involved in the multitude miracles** – how they've got to keep coming back to Jesus and back to the people. Back to Jesus and back to the people. That's a lesson that all of us have to learn and relearn and reappropriate all the time – every day. **Apart from Him, we can do nothing (Jn. 15:5) but through Him, we can do all things (Phil. 4:13).** Our ministries must be prayerfully and consciously bathed in the spirit of that thought.

I was talking to my pastor friend up in Spearfish the other week and just hashing out what we had going on that week and we were both really busy and he said, “*Pray for me. I don’t want to get into the trap of just doing ministry FOR Him. I want to do ministry FROM Him.*” One of the dangers of this world as believers, is we get really religious about *doing things* for Jesus while neglecting our personal relationship with Him. Because one of the first things to go when we’re busy is that devotional time and heart-to-heart time with God.

What do I mean by devotional time? I mean getting a cup of coffee, sitting down, and spending time with Him in the Word and prayer and worship. **A devotional time is vital and indispensable to the Christian.** It is simply choosing a time or setting aside certain times to spend with the Lord to hear His still, small voice. Jesus said in Matthew 6:6, “But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your father.” Jesus also modeled that as well by often withdrawing to places of solitude and praying (Lk. 6:16).

The idea is to find a space, maybe a spare room, the basement, the dining room table, the workshop, the patio, to just **meet with Him**. It might require rising early or staying up late after the kids go to bed. It is something that may take 10 minutes or 30 or even 60 minutes, depending on the day. It’s like your main spiritual course for the day and if you don’t have much time for that, it’s okay, you can also snack throughout the day – read your Bible as you wait at the doctor’s office or memorize verses instead of turning to a magazine or social media. Less news and more worship music.

If you’re one of those people who might say, “I’ve trusted Christ, but I still don’t feel like I’m getting this personal relationship thing,” I think developing a consistent devotional life is the key for you. I mean, you can’t have a relationship with someone if you don’t meet with them. You have to show up and meet with each other.

❖ **If you want a real, personal relationship with the Lord, just show up.**

If you want to live a life that is effective and where Jesus does ministry through you, you’ve got to show up to meet with Him. But I won’t pretend like this is easy. In fact, it can be awkward for a bit until you start to get a feel for how He leads you and speaks to you and strengthens you through it. It also just isn’t easy to make time for it. We don’t like to make time for it or sit still. It’s just not something we’re good at. It takes time and intentionality to build relationships.

Last week, I read something from A. W. Tozer that has been prodding me to action. He pointed out that even within the group of disciples there was an inner circle. Not that there was favoritism but that Peter, James and John were clearly closer. Because of their love for Jesus and they were given more insights like on the mount of transfiguration. **The closer you are to Jesus, to more He delights to reveal Himself and His ways to you.** But this is what Tozer said, “Each of the disciples was as close to Jesus as he chose to be, for the Son of God had no favorites.... It is a sobering thought that we too are as close to Christ as we really choose to be.”²¹ Wow, right? Point is, if you want something real, a real relationship with God and really making a difference, you’ve got to show up. **To be lead others to Christ, we must stay close Christ, like the disciples’ pattern of coming to Christ and then to the people.**

But also, in your personal relationship with the Lord, watch out for this pitfall we see in the Pharisees.

III. THE PITFALL: TESTING THE LORD WITH SIGNS & WONDERS. (VV. 10-13)

After the miraculous feeding the multitude, and every one of them being gorged like they just ate a Thanksgiving dinner, the text says that Jesus & the disciples cross over the lake again to the

western shores to a place called **Dalmanutha** or like Matthew says, **Magadan**. Dwight Pentecost said, "Magadan was the name of a town, while Dalmanutha in Aramaic meant 'the harbor.' Thus Dalmanutha was the harbor."ⁱⁱ

Whenever Jesus is on this side of the lake, the Pharisees come out of the woodwork to argue with Him. Just imagine how bad it would be if He was doing this ministry in Jerusalem and Judea area instead of up north in Galilee all this time. That's the reason He's here because as soon as He goes to Jerusalem soon, the whole city is stirred and the Pharisees and Sadducees just start questioning Him with theological questions. and He has to keep correcting them and it finally ends in a series of woe judgments on them and then Him on the cross, according to the Father's will of course.

But right here their questions are not primarily with various theological interpretations. They revolve around His identity. "If you really are the Christ, show us a sign from heaven! Show us something apocalyptic in the clouds or something." It's as if from His birth until now, with all that He's done, and all the witnesses, including the witness of Scripture, it hasn't been enough for them and it never will be, so Jesus denies them their sign. Even if He does a sign & wonder like this, do you really think they'll believe? No. They'll just claim it's by Satanic power again. There's no use with these guys. Actually Matthew records that Jesus also told them **no sign would be given them except the sign of Jonah, which is referring to the resurrection.**

I think we have to take home a principle from this snippet of Scripture to beware of always looking for signs and wonders. It's always tempting to try and test God by getting Him to affirm things for us through signs & wonders. Signs & wonders come up a lot in the book of Acts in the apostles' ministry because they were confirming the huge shift New Covenant shift in His program taking place but they just aren't the normal experience today. It's not that we don't believe God is capable of doing them, or that on some occasions does grant miracles like healing (He still does!), but there was a purpose for the signs & wonders and we can know looking back at those signs & wonders performed by the apostles that God is with the Church movement. They authenticated the apostles.

What God is more concerned about is us seeking Him by faith (not by sight) through His Word, and not through signs & wonders. Jesus even wanted to conceal many miracles because He wanted to magnify God's Word instead. His famous line is, "It is written." He actually warned of false messiahs performing false signs and wonders in the tribulation (Mt. 24:24). Part of the Anti-Christ's "ministry" is *powerful, but false*, signs and wonders (2 Thess. 2:9).

❖ **Seek God not through signs & wonders, but through His written Word.**

It's not wise, nor is it faith, to tell God that He must perform a sign or wonder in order for you to believe. It's quite the opposite of faith. And once you get grounded in the Word of God and in your devotional life begin to experience His living and active Word, you begin to realize how uncertain it is to look for a spiritual message in every shooting star or every cloud. Some folks find spiritual signs in their alphabet soup! The key to getting over that is getting grounded in the Word. I've had etched in my mind for a long time now a cartoon picture of a man on his knees asking God for a sign and a giant hand reaches down from heaven to drop him a Bible - "Here, read this!" John 20:29 says, "Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed." Faith is believing without having to see.

Anyway, verse 13, "Leaving them, He again embarked and went away to the other side," to Bethsaida according to verse 22. And on their way there, we see the most important reminder.

IV. **THE WARNING: BEWARE OF THE LEAVEN. (VV. 14-21)**

Jesus says, “Watch out! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.” It is obviously a sober warning He’s giving them. But these guys are “loafing” spiritually because, “They began to discuss with one another the fact that they had no bread.” It’s another face-palm moment! So Jesus basically says, “Guys, I’m not talking about bread. After the miracles, do you have any reason to be concerned about bread?”

And the text in Mark doesn’t really explain what the leaven is but Matthew and Luke help us out a bit more. First, the leaven “*of the Pharisees*” and “*of Herod*” is symbolic. Leaven is what you put in dough to make it rise and you don’t need much for it to work its way through the whole lump of dough. And that’s good if it’s a good leaven, but **leaven in the Bible is almost exclusively used for sin and corruption, as it is here.** Matthew 16:12 and Luke 12:1-3 says the leaven is **false teaching** and **hypocrisy**. And the two are hand in hand because **the false teaching of these Pharisees will lead to hypocrisy.** And I’m going to explain that. But what their teaching was we know is a performance-based righteousness and acceptance. Works-based righteousness we call Law or legalism.

Remember, Paul taught that legalism is like leaven too, in Galatians 5. He said if it was true that we have to earn our own righteousness by works, then Christ died needlessly (Gal. 2:21). We are saved by grace through faith in Christ and walk that way too. This is **one of the most repeated lessons in all the Bible.** The whole book of Galatians is written about it.

- ❖ **Beware of forgetting we’re saved by grace through faith in Christ and not our works or performance (Law/legalism). It’s His righteousness applied to us by faith and not our own righteousness.**

One of the mistake many believers make that can send them on spiritual rollercoasters is the mistake of trying to find a balance between legalism and license, putting them on a self-focused instead Christ-focused path. To them, the Christian life looks like this:



And most well-intentioned Christians trying to find a balance between these two would say if you’re going to err, at least err to the side of legalism because license is more dangerous. Therefore, legalism is justified in many churches. The problem is, as Galatians says, **legalism is very destructive to our soul and keeps people from knowing and experiencing the power of grace.** The tension in this chart (above) is not really biblical. A biblical tension actually is between Spirit and flesh.



The two extremes are not legalism and license, but spirit and flesh. **Legalism and license are actually both works of the flesh but to walk by the Spirit is to walk by faith that is grounded in the grace of Jesus Christ's death, burial and resurrection.** An even better tension resolver is to start thinking like this:



This is why legalism in the Pharisees produced hypocrisy. You are not restraining the flesh by legalism, you're just feeding it in a different way. To understand life in the Spirit, you have to understand grace and faith. Bryan Clark said, "Grace is the invitation to enter into the life of the Spirit. Grace is the basis, by faith, where we enter into the life of the Spirit and the power of the Spirit, and live the life that God has called us to."ⁱⁱⁱ This picture is such a good reminder to our flesh that the power to save and to live for Christ is by grace through faith in Him.

And since we are repeating things today, I want to finish by **sharing one of my favorite illustrations of all time: The Country Dog vs. the City Dog^{iv}**. Think of law and grace like two dogs. A **city dog lives under Law**. It lives under restrictions. It has boundaries. A leash, a collar, a chain, and a fence to keep it from getting loose and running free. His obedience is forced upon him. He is forced to obey. So what does the city dog often do when you let him off his leash and open the gate? He books it! Like a shot, runs free! That's what the Law and legalism does: it produces rebellion. It cannot restrain the flesh, but feeds it.

The **country dog**, on the other hand, **lives under grace**. It doesn't have the restrictions the city dog has. No leash, no chains, no fences sometimes and maybe not even a collar like my old dog. It has all the freedom in the world to run around and explore and have a good ole time. But where do you find the country dog most of the time? Right at home, sitting peacefully on the porch, waiting eagerly for his master to come home. He loves his master. Grace, then, produces the obedience that the Master desires because the power is in the grace. Grace will always outperform Law (See Romans 7 if you don't believe me).

I think that's a good picture of how grace works in our lives and why we must stand firm on it (Gal. 5:1). There is also a compilation of verses I'd encourage you to look up that contrasts Law and Grace (next page). It's one of the most important things I think I ever did in my own devotional life. Go through it sometimes this week.

CONTRASTING LAW AND GRACE

	<u>GRACE</u>	<u>LAW</u>
1. Romans 5:20-21	Abounds all the more	Sin increases
2. Romans 6:14	Sin is no longer your Master	Sin is your Master
3. Romans 6:18	Freed from sin	Slave to sin
4. Romans 7:4-5	Bear fruit for God	Bear fruit for death
5. Romans 7:8	Sin is dead	Sin is produced
6. Romans 7:9-11	I am alive	Sin alive & I am dead
7. Romans 8:6	Life and peace	Mind on flesh = death
8. 2 Cor. 3:5-11	Life-giving; Glory; R'ness	No Glory; Kills; Condemnation
9. Jas. 2:10	Walk freely	Brings Stumbling/Guilt
10. Gal. 2:16	Man is justified	No flesh is justified

ⁱ A. W. Tozer, *Enjoying Intimacy with God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House Publishers, 1980), 16-17.

ⁱⁱ 3J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, pp. 246-47.

ⁱⁱⁱ Bryan Clark, *The Foolishness of Legalism, A Study of the Epistle of Galatians, Galatians 3:1-14*, https://s3.amazonaws.com/LBC-Sermons/2013-09-29_Transcript_FreeIndeed_TheFoolishnessOfLegalism.pdf

^{iv} Bill Ewing, "What the Law Could Never Do," Level I Lay Class Discipleship Training (Rapid City, SD: Christian Life Ministries), DVD.