

Mark 8

Written by K B Napier
Tuesday, 24 August 2010 08:22

As I have said before, Jesus Christ was no namby-pamby! There is no way that Jesus would have the 'evangelical smile' or the limp-wristed handshake so common amongst Christians in our day! In every way, Jesus was a 'man's man' – tough, resolute, firm, with honour and without sin. He was as Man should be but is not.

In His words, Jesus did not mince His words, nor did He speak softly to those who needed hard talk. He was not as preachers are today, carefully choosing what to say so as to offend no-one (which, in turn, keeps income flowing). No, Jesus just talked bluntly and openly. If Jesus were asked to reword what He said so as to please the people, He would probably laugh in derision. Or, to put it in modern parlance, when I am told I must speak softly so as not to offend, I say I do not care a fig for creating social friendships, if it means going soft on sin. I will be as soft as the situation allows... but the situation today is far-gone and hard words are needed, regardless of how many then cast me aside for saying those words. I do not deliberately use hard words (not harsh), but find that the times to speak softly are now few and far between, because sin is rife, even in the churches.

So, follow Jesus, not the limp-wrists of today! Speak as He did, not as well-balanced social-climbing preachers and members do today. Act as He did, not as weak-kneed Christians do today. If you do not cause offence to at least some in your life, then you are not a genuine Christian but a pretender or one who cares more for your social standing than for God. Now go on to read more of the toughness of Christ.

Verses 1-9

1.

In those days the multitude being very great, and having nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples unto him, and saith unto them,

2.

I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat:

3.

And if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way: for divers of them came from far.

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4.

And his disciples answered him, From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?

5.

And he asked them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven.

6.

And he commanded the people to sit down on the ground: and he took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave to his disciples to set before them; and they did set them before the people.

7.

And they had a few small fishes: and he blessed, and commanded to set them also before them.

8.

So they did eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets.

9.

And they that had eaten were about four thousand: and he sent them away.

I will not give much detail here because the same comments apply to this miracle as apply to the similar previous one. This is a second miracle to use loaves and fish. Some absurd critics claim that Mark inserted the same story twice! However, it is obvious these are two separate but similar accounts of two similar gatherings and miracles. Only in this case the crowd had been with Jesus for three days without food. He knew many had come from far away and feared they would fall exhausted in the wilderness if He just sent them home.

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Incredibly, the disciples again asked Jesus how they could be fed, seeing as they were in the wilderness and, again, Jesus was exasperated by their inability to trust Him (see also what He said in the boat). We are all like this – though God acts decisively in our lives we always, with every new trial, beg for His mercy, which He gives us each time. On this occasion there were seven loaves and a “few small fishes”. This time Jesus Himself told the people to sit down. After thanking God for the provision, He broke the bread and fish into pieces, as before, and sent his disciples amongst them. This time seven baskets were filled with the remains. The number of people was four thousand (we can assume that figure refers only to the men), and once they were fed, Jesus dismissed them. Note how the disciples, even after so many miracles and a similar miracle with the 5000, still had no understanding of Jesus’ abilities and divinity. Such unbelief and incredulity exists amongst many in the churches today, whose pomposity, impiety and unrealistic aims and teachings prove their spiritual lack.

Verses 10-13

1.

And straightway he entered into a ship with his disciples, and came into the parts of Dalmanutha.

2.

And the Pharisees came forth, and began to question with him, seeking of him a sign from heaven, tempting him.

3.

And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and saith, Why doth this generation seek after a sign? verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation.

4.

And he left them, and entering into the ship again departed to the other side.

Immediately after the dispersal of the crowds, Jesus entered a ship with His disciples to sail to “the parts of Dalmanutha”. This also proves it is a second similar event and not a repeat of the first, for the details differ.

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This time the ship sailed down the western coast to a small town, Dalmanutha ('slow firebrand') close to Magdala or Magadan. As soon as His presence was made known the Pharisees came out to meet Him, again with unbelief and temptation. They called on Him to show them heavenly signs to prove Himself and Who He said He was. They did not want the all too obvious miracles He had so bounteously shown already! Rather, they wanted Him to bring a bolt from Heaven on His command, or angels, or something other than earth-bound miracles as signs. In this they acted more like Satan, who tried the very same kind of tempting.

Jesus "sighed deeply in his spirit" when He heard their demand. It was the sigh we read of previously when He healed the deaf-mute, and was a mark of His grief over the unbelief of God's people. With this in mind, Jesus said "Why doth this generation seek after a sign?... There shall no sign be given unto this generation."

Many try to apply this to modern times, but it is misplaced, for the words were given directly to the unbelieving Pharisees in Jesus' day. This is proved by the words "unto this generation". Yes, they can be applied in a loose and indefinite sense to modern Christians, but only as an example, not a direct teaching to us about our own circumstance. It is always an error to apply what Jesus said to specific persons in His own day, to our own day and position, without real thought.

Jesus' reason for saying what He said, was that these people did not believe Him. Jesus will not bow to the demands of unbelievers! And He did not on this occasion, either. He is not a stage magician using tricks to please the crowd! In His grief, Jesus got back into the ship and sailed to the eastern shore.

Verses 14-21

1.

Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, neither had they in the ship with them more than one loaf.

2.

And he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod.

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3.

And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have no bread.

4.

And when Jesus knew it, he saith unto them, Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened?

5.

Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember?

6.

When I brake the five loaves among five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? They say unto him, Twelve.

7.

And when the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? And they said, Seven.

8.

And he said unto them, How is it that ye do not understand?

As they sailed, the disciples said they had forgotten to take food with them (even though there were seven baskets-full after the last meeting!). They had just one loaf of bread with them. Jesus passed comment: 'Be careful to watch for the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod.'

As if Jesus did not know their hearts, the disciples whispered amongst themselves, wondering what Jesus meant, saying He meant they had no food. In my ministry I often have to give meanings not immediately apparent in the text. This is because God's word, given through a

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called teacher, can often contain many meanings not immediately apparent from the actual words themselves. Jesus was merely giving them a spiritual lesson in brief. In a way this shows us that what a Christian reads is not always how he understands. It is why God appoints called teachers and preachers, who give, if you like, an 'extended' or deeper meaning, a meaning given to them by the Holy Spirit!

Knowing their thoughts, Jesus repeated the same challenge as He gave them after the first similar miracle. 'Why do you question what will happen because you have no food? You saw what I did, and yet you still don't understand! Have you hardened your hearts again? You've got eyes and ears – can't you see and hear? Don't you remember what you just saw?'

Jesus then reminded them: 'In the first incident how many baskets of food were left over?' They said 'Twelve'. 'And when we just fed the 4000, how many were left?' They said 'seven'. With exasperation Jesus asked 'Well, why don't you understand?' His short statement said that we should beware of the way human spiritual 'leaders' add their own brand of teaching to what God says, altering the whole meaning and placing burdens on them that should not be there. It is true to say that almost every church today does this! If you do not believe me, check what you do and see if it is scriptural.

Christians today do not expect God to answer their pleas and prayers, so even if He did, they would not recognize the answer! If you are like this, I ask what Jesus asked: 'Why don't you understand?'

Verses 22-26

1.

And he cometh to Bethsaida; and they bring a blind man unto him, and besought him to touch him.

1.

And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought.

2.

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And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking.

3.

After that he put his hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up: and he was restored, and saw every man clearly.

4.

And he sent him away to his house, saying, Neither go into the town, nor tell it to any in the town.

Jesus and the disciples went on to Bethsaida, where people brought a blind man to Jesus so that he could touch Him. They had faith that a mere touch would effect a miracle. Jesus led the man outside the town, put spittle on his eyes and laid hands on him. Note that Jesus did not use a formula or necessarily do the same things the same way, unlike those charismatics who use fake techniques to fool the people and themselves.

When Jesus had touched the man's eyes, He asked if he could see anything. The man said "I see men as trees walking". So Jesus again touched the man's eyes and told him to look upwards, which he did, and his eyes were healed, so that he could see everyone clearly. Jesus sent him home, telling him not to go back to town or to anyone there.

Why did the miracle have to use two approaches? Divine healing is always instant and complete. So, what happened? The first thing we can say definitely, is that Jesus did not *have* to execute the miracle in two parts. Nor were they 'attempts'; nor did the first activity fail in some way. Both answers would negate the deity of Christ. There had to be another reason why the miracle took two actions!

The man first saw men indistinctly; to him they looked like trees walking about! This suggests he was not blind from birth, but had knowledge of what trees looked like. This is confirmed by the text, which says the eyes were 'restored'. The word means to return to a former state (of sight).

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Jesus led the man out of town... in Matthew 11:21 we find Jesus rebuked Bethsaida for its unbelief. So it seems Jesus wanted to be outside the town precincts, because of its infidelity to God. The two-step miracle appears to have been conducted for the sake of the blind man, so that he could realize faith, or for those who were watching. God often used physical things and actions to display His might, and that onlookers would know it was Christ or God and not any other cause. The same approach was used in many Old Testament miracles. These are assumptions, for we are not given the reason for the two-steps, which was very unusual. Suffice to say that Jesus can do whatever He wishes. We may not conjecture that because Jesus did something a certain way, that we have the same power or way of working. Nor does it excuse claims to miraculous healings by modern-day charismatics, that take time to come into being, or are imperfect, such supposed healings being occult or psychological deceptions.

Verses 27-30

1.

And Jesus went out, and his disciples, into the towns of Caesarea Philippi: and by the way he asked his disciples, saying unto them, Whom do men say that I am?

2.

And they answered, John the Baptist: but some say, Elias; and others, One of the prophets.

3.

And he saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ.

4.

And he charged them that they should tell no man of him.

After this miracle, Jesus and the disciples went to the towns of Caesarea Philippi, which was at the lower end of Lebanon to the north. It was rebuilt by Philip the tetrarch. (Another Caesarea existed on the Mediterranean coast, Caesarea of Palestine, built by Herod the Great).

On the road, Jesus asked His disciples who onlookers thought He was. They said many thought

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He was John the Baptist back from the dead (as did Herod). Others, they said, thought He was Elijah (Elias), the great prophet. Yet others thought He was a prophet, but not sure which one.

Jesus listened and then made the query more personal, by asking the disciples Who *they* thought He was. Immediately, Peter replied, 'You are the Messiah'! At last the disciples knew Who Jesus really was! Jesus, typically, told them to keep quiet about His identity. The time was not yet right for others to be told.

In our own day, many ministers 'stand on their dignity' and demand respect and honour simply for holding a title!! They wear dog-collars, put 'Rev' before their name, and wear dark suits, as if to emphasize their perceived spiritual status. It is all vanity, for a man called by God needs to prove himself by his words and deeds. No dog-collar or title can be a substitute for actual proof! The word 'reverend' is only used once in scripture, to describe attributes of God. This is why I refuse to use it. Even using 'pastor' as a title is not acceptable, because a pastor is a servant of the congregation, not a master or manager! We must be known by our words and deeds, not by any claimed title. As my late mother used to tell us: "Let me see what you say".

Verses 31-38

1.

And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

2.

And he spake that saying openly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him.

3.

But when he had turned about and looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men.

4.

And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

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5.

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.

6.

For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

7.

Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

8.

Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

After the disciples admitted Who Jesus was, He began to teach them even more. I have no doubt that the Lord teaches us individually once we show faith and acknowledge truth. But, without this, He will not teach us anything (because teaching requires learning, and if we do not wish to learn we cannot be taught!).

Jesus began to tell them that He, the "Son of man" must suffer "many" things... not only the horrific physical abuse (which is much romanticized by many today), but also the mental agony of bearing the weight of the sin of the elect on His shoulders. 'Son of man' is equal to Son of God, used to describe another aspect of His activity. 'Son' (as in Son of God) using the capital, balances the 'man' part of Christ with His divinity, by referring to Him as fully human.

Jesus prophesied that the elders, chief priests and scribes (the religious rulers of Israel) would reject Him as Messiah, and would kill Him. But, He would rise again after three days (or, more precisely, on the third day). But, Peter would not hear of it, and rebuked Jesus for saying it. Jesus turned around and, looking at all the disciples, and Himself rebuked Peter: "Get thee

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behind me Satan!" He was told off for trying to stop the work of God, albeit for what seemed to be a good reason. Was He calling Peter himself 'Satan'. No, of course not. Rather, He was saying that Peter was acting wrongly, like Satan, by wanting to stop His death and subsequent resurrection, both vital to the salvation of men, and the sole reason for Christ coming to earth.

Very often Christians unwittingly try to thwart what God demands or requires, because they do not understand His holiness or what He wills. Indeed, many do not understand their own spirituality. This is because we tend to attribute to God our own emotions and desires, as if God was merely a kind of super-human being. He is not – He is supreme and above His creatures, having no emotions to hamper what He says and does, and no variance caused by adverse thoughts. Everything He says and does is always pure, absolute and fixed. Peter was, without knowing it, trying to stop the plan of God effected through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Then, talking to all the people around Him, including the disciples, He said that if anyone wished to be His disciples, they must completely lose their own selves and follow Him without doubt or human desires for personal earthly gains. This was a universal teaching for all who were, or would be, elect. So, it applies to us also. Have you handed over your whole life to Christ? By that I mean are you selfless, wanting only what God wants? Only when you are like this can God use you and be with you. We cannot claim to follow Christ if we live for ourselves and our own pleasure or will. Disciples must take up their cross. This does not mean we can share in His sacrifice (because that would make us co-redemptors), but we will similarly suffer for Him, if we are genuine.

Those who think they can follow Christ without handing their lives over to God are deluded, and will lose their lives. That is, when they die they will enter hell and will not be in eternal heaven. But, those who lose their lives, their human desires and wish to do their 'own thing', will be accepted by God and will enter heaven. No, this is nothing to do with our own choices, or free will, or Arminianism! It is, rather, rhetorical, calling on all who claim salvation to *act* like those who are saved!

As Christ said, what is the point of getting what you want in this life if you lose your eternal self? It does not matter what your earthly desire or ambition is, it will cause you to enter hell if it prevents you from belonging to Christ. How does this square with predestination? I do not know, but it does.

And, He said, what can a man give to God to gain salvation? Nothing at all, because it is all of

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God's grace and mercy! The people He was talking to belonged, He said, to an "adulterous and sinful generation". The Jews were far from God and worshipped wickedly, preferring their own idols rather than holiness. Is this not like us today? An idol can be anything. Though Jesus was speaking directly to those in His own day, His words also apply to everyone on earth in every age.

Those who are ashamed of Jesus will cause God to be ashamed of them, when Jesus and the angels return at the end of time to catch up the elect. To be 'ashamed' means to desert the Gospel; to avoid suffering for Christ; to not help those who need help as they suffer for Christ; and even to avoid offending people in order to appear 'balanced' and sociable. In other words, to act in such a way as to be the opposite of holy.

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