

Mark 8 • The Work of the Suffering Servant

Introduction

Hebrew scholars during the Second Temple Period – the time leading up to Christ's First Coming culminated by the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD – derived from Scripture two pictures of the Messiah to come which they called "HaMashiach Ben Joseph" – "The Messiah the Son of Joseph", and "HaMashiach Ben David" – "The Messiah the Son of David". They knew that the Messiah would come in the character of Joseph as a servant and called this aspect of the Messiah "The Suffering Servant". But they also knew He would come in the character of David which they called "The Conquering King". They had great debates as to how the Messiah would come and fulfill both aspects at the same time. What they failed to realize which we now understand in hindsight is that it is one Messiah, but two comings. At His First Coming Jesus fulfills the work of the Suffering Servant and dying for sin; at His Second Coming He fulfills the work of the Conquering King and establishes His kingdom. The Gospel of Mark concentrates on how Jesus fulfilled the role of the Suffering Servant and this chapter provides an overall view of that particular work.

¹In those days, when there was again a large crowd and they had nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples and said to them, ²"I feel compassion for the people because they have remained with Me now three days and have nothing to eat. ³If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way; and some of them have come from a great distance."

⁴And His disciples answered Him, "Where will anyone be able to find enough bread here in this desolate place to satisfy these people?"

⁵And He was asking them, "How many loaves do you have?"

And they said, "Seven."

⁶And 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. ⁷They also had a few small fish; and after He had blessed them, He ordered these to be served as well. ⁸And they ate and were satisfied; and they picked up seven large baskets full of what was left over of the broken pieces.

⁹About four thousand were there; and He sent them away.

[Read v.1-9]

Q: Where is this taking place?

A: In Mk. 7:31 leading into this chapter we are told that this is "within the region of Decapolis", a Greek term meaning "ten cities". It was actually an independent Gentile culture like a separate country which had its own army, court system, and currency. What is significant here is that Jesus is ministering among a population that is mainly Gentile.

Q: What is the chief characteristic of the Suffering Servant being expressed in this event?

A: Compassion. (v.2)

Q: Is this the same event as the feeding of the 5,000?

Mark 6:32-44

- 5,000+ people, mostly Jews
- With Jesus one day
- Takes place in Galilee
- Five loaves, two fish
- Twelve baskets left over (small lunch baskets)

Mark 8:1-9

- 4,000+ people, mostly Gentiles
- With Jesus three days
- Takes place near the Decapolis
- Seven loaves, a few fish
- Seven baskets left over (large hampers)

Q: It was not that long ago when Jesus fed the 5,000. Why would Jesus' followers question Him again in the same situation?

A: It is most likely because the last event and during the beginning of Jesus' ministry He focused almost exclusively on the Jews; now He is showing the same compassion for the Gentiles.

Application: By Jesus' time Judaism had come to falsely embrace the notion that they were to separate themselves and never engage Gentiles in direct opposition to their calling to be a light to the rest of the world. The Suffering Servant comes to fulfill God's whole plan to **BOTH** Jew and Gentile.

¹⁰And immediately He entered the boat with His disciples and came to the district of Dalmanutha. ¹¹The Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, to test Him. ¹²Sighing 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.” ¹³Leaving them, He again embarked and went away to the other side.

¹⁴And they had forgotten to take bread, and did not have more than one loaf in the boat with them. ¹⁵And He was giving orders to them, saying, “Watch out! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.”

¹⁶They began to discuss with one another the fact that they had no bread. ¹⁷And 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? ¹⁸“HAVING EYES, DO YOU NOT SEE? AND HAVING EARS, DO YOU NOT HEAR? And do you not remember, ¹⁹when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces you picked up?”

They said to Him, “Twelve.”

²⁰“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.”

²¹And He was saying to them, “Do you not yet understand?”

[Read v.10-21]

Q: Where does this event take place?

A: “*The district of Dalmanutha*” indicates that they have crossed the Sea of Galilee and returned to a place that is mainstream Israel and therefore mostly Jewish. Since “*Dalmanutha*” literally means “slow firebrand”, there might also be a spiritual allusion to what is taking place here.

Q: Why would Jesus respond to their test by “sighing deeply in His spirit”?

A: When they are asking for a “*sign from heaven*”, this could also be translated as “an attesting miracle” to better understand what they are looking for. He had fed the 5,000 – mainly composed of Jews, and yet this was not proof enough for the Pharisees because we know in the parallel account in John (Jn. 6:30-33) that their standard was something akin to Moses who had brought down bread from heaven rather than multiplying earthly bread as Jesus had done. (See Dt. 8:3 about manna.)

Q: So what is Jesus actually saying when He declares, “Truly I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation”? Is He refusing to reveal Himself to the Jews?

A: This is actually a way of stating that because they have set their own standards by which to test the Messiah and in the process dismissed His authority and miracles, they will not be given a sign by their own standards but will have to make do with the ones He is providing.

Point: *A yielded and believing heart is strengthened by the works of Christ; a hardened and unrepentant heart rejects them and is ultimately judged by them.*

Q: Why was the issue not really about the bread but the leaven?

A: Leaven had to be removed from every Jewish household during Passover (Ex. 12:18-20) and leaven was prohibited with offerings. (Ex. 23:18; 34:25; Lev. 2:11; 6:17) It is not just an allusion to sin but to false doctrine (Gal. 5:1-9), unjudged sin in the Church (1 Co. 5), and hypocrisy (Lk. 12:1). This is not about temporarily backsliding from the truth but pursuing a spiritually unfaithful lifestyle.

You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion did not come from Him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough.

— Galatians 5:7–9

Q: What, exactly, is the “leaven of the Pharisees”?

A: Hypocrisy and false teaching. The Pharisees were those who had twisted the Word of God into something never intended.

Q: What, exactly, is the “leaven of Herod”?

A: Worldly compromise. The Herodians forsook the Word of God in favor of becoming as much like the Romans as possible.

Q: What is the lesson that Jesus wants the disciples to learn? Why is He making a big deal about the bread and the feeding of the 5,000 and 4,000?

A: Signs and wonders always point to a greater teaching which is more important than the signs and wonders themselves. Physical bread only satiates physical hunger temporarily; spiritual bread addresses something much greater whether it is to consume the erroneous teachings of the Pharisees and Herodians or the Gospel of the Messiah.

Q: Why do the two healings – one preceding this section and the one to follow – actually reflect what has been taking place here?

A: These two men – the deaf man with the speech impediment (Mk. 7:31-37) and the blind man – illustrate the disciples' spiritual condition described in v.18.

Observation: Jewish readers in the 1st Century would connect these two miracles with the messianic promises of Isaiah 53.

Q: What is the chief characteristic of the Suffering Servant being expressed in this event?

A: Concern.

Application: The Suffering Servant does not merely come with the authority of God's signs and miracles but with a greater burden that everyone should understand and accept the greater message behind them.

[Read v.22-26]

²²And they came to Bethsaida. And they brought a blind man to Jesus and implored Him to touch him. ²³Taking the blind man by the hand, He brought him out of the village; and after spitting on his eyes and laying His hands on him, He asked him, "Do you see anything?"

²⁴And he looked up and said, "I see men, for I see them like trees, walking around."

²⁵Then again He laid His hands on his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored, and began to see everything clearly. ²⁶And He sent him to his home, saying, "Do not even enter the village."

Q: Where does this event take place?

A: Bethsaida which literally means "House of Provision". It is an interesting step in the sequence of places visited in this chapter.

Q: What is unique about how Jesus healed this blind man compared to other blind men as recorded in the Gospels?

A: The Gospels record Jesus healing at least seven blind people and each time the approach was different. This is the only "gradual" miracle recorded in any of the Gospels and it is also unique in that he not only took the man away from the crowd but out of the town.

Q: Why do you suppose Jesus took the man not just away from the crowd but out of the city entirely?

A: In the context of what has been taking place to this point, one of the key issues is people rejecting the greater message and meaning behind the miracles. It would be a very powerful way of Christ letting the town know it was under the judgment of God as He specifically stated in Matthew 11:21-24. Just as with the Pharisees, no more evidence would be given to them.

Q: Was this man born blind?

A: Probably not since he could recognize the difference between men and trees. (v.24) Spiritually he represents someone backslidden in the character of the Prodigal Son.

Q: What might be the greater teaching of the gradual two-stage healing of the blind man?

A: It is probably an allusion to the fact spiritually it is not just about being able to see, but being taught how to use the eyesight once it is restored. In other words, it is an illustration of salvation followed by sanctification, of discipleship and no longer living according to the old life.

Q: What is significant about Jesus both sending him "to his home" and simultaneously commanding him, "Do not even enter the village"?

A: It means that the man was not from Bethsaida, the city from which Jesus removed him, and was therefore not to return to the old life but to become Christ's witness by returning to his home town as a witness of a new creation in Christ.

Q: What is the chief characteristic of the Suffering Servant displayed to those in Bethsaida?

A: Condemnation. This is always what Christ's works accomplish in those who reject Him personally.

Application: *The Suffering Servant doesn't come to merely restore sight to the spiritually blind, but to educate them how to "see" going forward according to the true intent and meaning of God's Word and will.*

²⁷Jesus went out, along with His disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way He questioned His disciples, saying to them, "Who do people say that I am?"

²⁸They told Him, saying, "John the Baptist; and others say Elijah; but others, one of the prophets."

²⁹And He continued by questioning them, "But who do you say that I am?"

Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ."

³⁰And He warned them to tell no one about Him.

³¹And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³²And He was stating the matter plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him.

³³But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

[Read v.27-33]

Q: What might be indicated by the fact that the next event takes place in Caesarea Philippi?

A: The literal meaning of "Caesarea" is "severed".

Q: How might "severed" be appropriate to this section?

A: Christ is separating Himself from the affiliations being attributed to Him by the people and establishing in plain language to His disciples that He is not only the Messiah, but fulfilling the scriptural role of the Suffering Servant.

Q: Why would "severed" be especially appropriate where the Suffering Servant is concerned?

A: Although they recognized that the Messiah would come as both the Suffering Servant and the Conquering King, by Jesus' time they no longer wanted a Suffering Servant; they desired only the Conquering King to conquer the Romans, establish His kingdom, and rule the earth from Jerusalem. Christ is now beginning to teach them the fact that it is "one Messiah, two comings" and that the work He had come to do is **NOT** that of the Conquering King and all that is associated with the Millennial Reign, but that of the Suffering Servant as ultimately expressed in His crucifixion.

Observation: *This obsession with the Messiah the Conquering King explains not only Jesus' harsh treatment of Peter in this particular instance, but is revealed by how Peter reacted at the Mt. of Transfiguration (he believed the Millennial Reign had begun), and the disciples' question of when this would occur at the Olivet Discourse, when He rose from the dead, and just prior to His ascension (Acts 1:6-8).*

Q: What is the chief attribute of the Suffering Servant being expressed?

A: Crucifixion. He will reiterate this teaching in Mark 9:30-32 and Mark 10:32-34.

Application: *In His First Coming the Messiah comes as the Suffering Servant to be crucified and pay the price for sin; it is only at His Second Coming that the Messiah comes as the Conquering King to establish His Millennial Kingdom.*

³⁴And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. ³⁵For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. ³⁶For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? ³⁷For what will a man give in exchange for his soul? ³⁸For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”

[Read v.34-38]

Q: So what has been the greater teaching behind everything else that has taken place up to this point?

A: The proof of belief in Christ and His work is found in discipleship, those who actually put His Word and example into practice and live like Him.

But what does it say? “THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART”—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

— Romans 10:8–10

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.

— 1 John 4:1–3

Q: From this teaching, what are the three conditions Jesus establishes for true discipleship?

1. We must surrender ourselves completely to Him.
2. We must identify with Him in suffering and death.
3. We must follow Him obediently wherever He leads.

Q: This is not a trick question: Is denying self the same as self-denial?

A: Self-denial is what takes place when we occasionally give something up; denying self is what takes place when we surrender ourselves to Christ for the purpose of exclusively obeying His Word and ways alone.

Application: *The act of salvation may be marked by a dedication to Christ, but what must take place going forward is a daily “dying to self” as we take up our cross and follow Him. From the human perspective we are losing ourselves, from the divine perspective we are finding ourselves.*

Q: What is given here as the motivation for true discipleship?

A: “...for My sake and the Gospel’s...” (v.35) It is simultaneously an inward working in terms of our relationship with Christ (“for My sake”) and an outward working in terms of our relationship with others (“and the Gospel’s”).

Application: *Because we live for Him we therefore live for others.*

Q: What chief attribute of the Suffering Servant is here being expressed?

A: Consecration.

Application: *The Suffering Servant does not come to make citizens or converts but disciples, people whose lives visibly reflect the spiritual condition of their hearts.*

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Overall Application

- *How well are each of these characteristics reflected in your own personal walk with Christ?*
- *How well are each of these characteristics reflected in your local ministry and/or fellowship?*
- *To what extent might we have replaced the fundamental working of the Suffering Servant with an undue desire for something else, even for His future coming as the Conquering King?*

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