

In the Boat Again



Mark 8:

From time to time, if there's a ballgame going on that I'm interested in like the NBA finals between the Warriors and the Raptors. If I'm not getting to watch the game, but talking to someone who is, I usually ask what the score is and I get the score. There's a big difference when you hear the score depending on whether the game is over or not, so sometimes I follow up that first question with a second question of how much time is left. There's a big difference if you're down ten points with two minutes to go in the first half, than if you're down ten with two minutes to go in the game. Do you agree? In case you're wondering, (you may not be) we're in the gospel of Mark. I want you to feel the excitement this morning because there's literally three minutes to go in the first half. I'm telling you that because it's not going to look good this morning. I don't know if you've read ahead in our text, but if I were the coach of the disciples, I would probably want to throw a chair like Bobby Knight did one time. Just to be honest! I would want to bench my entire starting twelve and start over. But here's the good news, literally, we're going to be in the 8th chapter of the gospel of Mark. It's not going to be half time until next week. Next week, you're going to see a shot taken by the disciples that's going to beat the buzzer and end the first half on a great note. Then the following Sunday, we're going to kick off the second half of the gospel of Mark. You know there are sixteen chapters in Mark. I'm not saying that just because

chronologically we're about to the middle of the book. Theologically next week we will end the first half of the gospel of Mark, but this morning, there are three minutes to go. When this sermon is over, it's going to look bad for the home team. We are not doing very good. But when we leave this morning, I just want you to remember this; it's still the first half. The disciples have the whole second half of the book to get it together. The question is how much time do you have left? I know we don't know exactly, but is it possible that some of us are in the first half of life and still don't get it. But what about if some of us are nearing the end of the game of life and we still don't get it? The problem is no one knows if they're in the first half or the second half, but God wants us to learn from the story about the disciples that Mark recorded under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Are you guys ready? It's not going to be a good story. It's a terrible story. As a matter of fact, I read the story and go, are you kidding me? Let's read beginning in Mark 8:1 and we're going to read all the way to verse 21. I want you to see how Mark masterfully weaves these stories together. If you're here this morning, you really need to come back next week because it's going to be amazing because that will be the last two minutes of the first half and you don't want to miss it.

Scripture

"In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat, he called his disciples to him and said to them, "I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. And if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way. And some of them have come from far away." And his disciples answered him, (Let's groan. We've heard this story before. I great crowd of people, they're hungry, it's a desolate place; does anyone remember what Jesus did? He took five loaves and two fish and fed five thousand me, besides women and children, and possible fed twenty to twenty-five thousand people. Listen to what the disciples say.) "How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?" (Are you kidding me? Are you serious? That's what they asked!) And he asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven." And he directed

the crowd to sit down on the ground. And he took the seven loaves, and having given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and they set them before the crowd. And they had a few small fish. And having blessed them, he said that these also should be set before them. And they ate and were satisfied. And they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. And there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away. And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha. The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him. And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, "Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation." And he left them, got into the boat again, and went to the other side. Now they had forgotten to bring bread, and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. (Is this exciting? Jesus just did what He did with seven loaves, four thousand people, and now there are twelve people in a boat, one loaf of bread; this is glorious!) And he cautioned them, saying, "Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." And they began discussing with one another the fact that they had no bread. And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? 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 did you take up?" They said to him, "Twelve." "And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?" And they said to him, "Seven." And he said to them, "Do you not yet understand?"

I just wonder if it's possible this morning that God might say this to some of us. "Do you not yet understand?"

(Prayer)

Father, I pray none of us is here just out of flesh. It is possible that this is just a habit that some of us have, and it would be a great habit to have. But Father, we don't want to come to church and check off a box. No, we want to be in a worship service, we want to be in a personal encounter with You. We want to believe You are going to speak to us this morning through the text. Father, each one of us realize we come to church to where the pastors just don't pick their favorite text and we don't use the text to say what we want to say; we like to just preach and teach the books and say what the book says. There is no one here to hear what I believe or think. We're here to hear what You say, what You believe, and what You think. So Father, I pray we're here with a holy hunger this morning, a hunger not to be a walking library of information about biblical facts, but a person who can take biblical facts, apply them, and live this thing out at home in all of our relationships because we believe You have a plan. Your plan is to change our lives so that our changed lives can ultimately give someone else hope, hope that their life can be changed too. Thank You for when life puts the squeeze on us because that's when we really get to display what we really believe by showing who we really are. Thank You Father. It's in Your precious Son's name we pray, amen.

As Mark comes to the end of the first half of his gospel, he doesn't tell us in this section of Scripture, but he has just told us that Jesus is in the Gentile side of the Sea of Galilee; therefore, we assume He is still there when all of a sudden a great crowd of people gathers around Jesus. If you remember this in the chapter before, He's just taken His disciples off the Jewish side of the Sea of Galilee into the Gentile side. He hasn't been here very long, He's just done a couple of things, and all of a sudden, there is this great crowd of people, at least four thousand people, gathered around Him. I don't know about you, but when I use my sanctified imagination, I just happen to believe, I'm not sure about this, but want to believe. Do you remember earlier when Jesus made the trek across the sea in Mark chapter 5 and He met the man possessed with demons, and when He cured the

man, the demons asked permission to go get in the swine, which ran down into the water and committed suicide? When the people realized that Jesus caused such great economic damage to that man who owned the pigs, they asked Him to leave with the disciples and they left. Jesus told the man not to say anything, but he did. He went back home and told all his friends what the Lord had done for him. I want to believe that everywhere that man who had had demons showed up, and everyone remembered him in the cemetery cutting himself, when they see him now in a public place in his right mind, somebody had to say, you're different. What happened to you? I think with a big grin on his face, he said, 'Let me tell you about this man I met! His name is Jesus. Let me tell you what He did for me!' The next thing you know, that man began to publish the report about Jesus.

Now, Jesus is standing on their soil, and many of those people in that crowd, who had heard about that man possessed with demon being in his right mind, are now flocking to hear Jesus and He is teaching for three days with them. All of a sudden, He looked around and said to His disciples, hey guys; I've got compassion for this crowd of people. They've been with Me for three days, they have nothing to eat, if I send them home right now, some of them aren't going to get back home; they are going to faint on the way home because they're so famished. I just want to feed all four thousand of them right now. I don't know about you, but is this not the moment for Andrew, Peter, James, or John to stand up and say, ok Lord; we'll see how many loaves we've got in the crowd! No! Do you know what they actually say to Jesus? How can one person provide bread for all these people in this desolate place? If I'm Jesus, I'm saying, 'Are you kidding me?' Here's what He says, "How many loaves do we have?"

Because this story sounds just like the other story, you've got to know this. Some of the scholars that I read say this story is made up. It's really not true; there was only one feeding. Are you aware of that? I want to be honest with you; we don't believe that at Hardin. We believe just a few chapter ago, we had a feeding of five thousand people, and now we're getting ready to have a feeding of four thousand people. We've got to ask this question. Why in a book like Mark that is so short, so brief, trying to get to the cross, why would the Bible record two miracle stories that are

almost just alike? Can I tell you what I believe? This is coming at the end of the first half of the book. If you'll remember when we had the feeding of the five thousand men, besides women and children, which means there were probably twenty to twenty-five thousand people that were fed with five loaves and two fishes, that was on the Jewish side of the Sea of Galilee. The disciples, who were Jewish, were ministering to those people who were just like them. At the end of the day after Jesus had taught for one day, they were so worried about the people because they didn't have food that the disciples said, hey Jesus, we need to send them away so they can get some food because if they don't get fed, they're not going to make it. Then Mark tells us Jesus had compassion on that crowd of Jewish people, and Jesus took five loaves and two fishes and fed twenty to twenty-five thousand people. We're not on Jewish soil now. We're on Gentile soil. The Jewish people had this thought that Gentiles were unclean. And we just had this story where Jesus is on Gentile territory is in this house, this woman comes in who has a sick child, and she wants Jesus to heal the child. Jesus looks at her and says I can't give the children's bread to the dogs. She saw the twinkle in His eye, the grin on His cheek, and she flashed back with that's right, Lord, you don't give the children's bread to the dogs, but the dogs do get to eat the crumbs that fall from the children's plate. Now, if that's the only story we have about Jesus interrelating with Gentile people, here is what we would think if we were Gentiles. We don't get to sit at the table with the Jews; we're second-class. We're a race of people that is inferior; therefore, all we can hope to do is for a crumb to fall from the Jewish table. Is that what God wants us to believe as Gentiles? No. Remember, the gospel of Mark is not being written to a Jewish church; it's being written to a Gentile church that's suffering. That's why we have this second miracle story. We have Jesus now fully on Gentile soil, and all of a sudden we've got a crowd of four thousand, not men besides women and children, just people, four thousand Gentile people on Gentile soil, and they've been with Jesus three days. He's been teaching them three days, not one day, three days. When they get ready to end that third day, not the disciples, but Jesus looks at His disciples and said these people are famished!

In the first story, Mark said Jesus had compassion on them, but in this story, Jesus Himself said I have compassion for them, My heart breaks for

them; I've got strong feelings! He's expressing His feelings for a Gentile! I know we don't get this because the church today is primarily made up of Gentiles, but can you imagine being that group of Gentile people believing the Jews were God's chosen people because they kept telling you they were God's chosen people, and now you have Mark writing a gospel where Jesus is saying I have compassion for these people! Do you know what He does? He says how many loaves you have. We've got seven. He takes the seven loaves after He personally seats the people. In the first story, the disciples sat the people in groups of fifty and a hundred. Now Jesus sits the crowd, and He takes that bread; He doesn't do what He did when He was on Jewish soil. When He was on Jewish soil, He raised His hands to pray because that's what Jews did. No, He doesn't raise His hands; He now prays like a Gentile. He just blesses the food, and He hands it to the disciples and they scatter it out. He feeds four thousand people. They also have a few fish. In the first story, He blesses the loaves and the fish at the same time, but in this story, after blessing the bread, He blesses the fish and passes the fish out. When they passed the bread out and the fish out, everybody eats and are satisfied, and when they take up the fragments leftover, when they clean the table, so to speak, they had seven baskets left over.

In the first story, the word for basket was a little basket. In other words, in that first story when Jesus fed the twenty to twenty-five thousand Jewish people, there was enough food left over for each of the disciples, twelve little baskets. But the word for basket here is not a little basket. It's a word that means big basket. As a matter of fact, it's the same word that's used in Acts 9 when Saul gets saved and the church doesn't believe he's really saved. They think it's a false profession. He has to be let out of the city through a hole in the wall for his own safety. They let him down in a basket. Does everyone agree when the Bible says they let Saul down out of the city in a basket, that wasn't a lunchbox size basket? Just use your mind. How big a basket would it take to put a man safe in a basket and lower him down a wall? Fifty-five gallon size basket...does that sound about right? That's the picture here. When they fed the four thousand Gentiles and took up baskets of food, seven fifty-five gallon trash baskets, if we can say that, left over. Wow! Why is Mark recording this story? He's recording this story to say to the Gentile church that God doesn't just love the Jews;

God loves Gentiles too. Jesus is not just the bread from heaven who would give His life on the cross to die for the Jewish nation; Jesus Christ is dying for the nations of the whole world! He loves Jews and Gentiles too! Paul can say I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God and the salvation for everyone that believes, to the Jew first, and to the Gentile.

In the earlier story, we're just waiting our turn for a few crumbs that will fall from the table of the Jewish people. Not anymore! No, Christ died for all! The death of Jesus Christ on the cross is sufficient for the sins of the whole world, but it only saves those who believe. Wow! Can you imagine being with the Jewish church that day, those early twelve, seeing Jesus do what He just did on Gentile soil? They get in the boat and come back, and as soon as they land on the soil, they meet some Pharisees. Mark is being quicker; he's trying to get to the cross, but listen to this. Mark tells us they're testing Him and they start a debate with Him; they're arguing with Him. Finally, it gets to the point where they just say give us a sign. Remember when Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, he said Gentiles seek wisdom and Jews seek signs. They want a sign. You know who the Pharisees are; they're the religious crowd, the religious leaders. In the gospels, they're put in a negative light, but I want to say this to you. If they were here today, moved into our neighborhood, and bought the house next door to you, you would be praising God they lived beside you because they would be great neighbors. As a matter of fact, the first thing you would do is see how good they were and you would invite them to Hardin Baptist Church. Later, when they became pastors, deacons, Sunday school teachers, and leaders in the church, you would puff up a little bit and let the pastor know you brought him to Hardin. They were a group of people, six thousand, living in the land who dedicated themselves to keeping all six hundred and thirteen of the laws of Moses. They believed that if any, one time, of those men kept all six hundred and thirteen of the laws of Moses, God would usher in the messianic age and it would send the Messiah and establish the Davidic kingdom. The Jewish nation would rule the world and the Gentiles would be servants to the Jews in this kingdom. Now, they're standing face to face with the King, the Messiah; He's here. And all they want to do is debate with Him. All they want to do is test them. He looks at them and says sorry; I'm not going to give you a

sign. Then listen to what the bible says in verse 13, "...He left them." There is far more going on here than just physically leaving them. He leaves them. He turns from them, He gets in the boat again and goes to the other side, and that is the title of the sermon, 'On the Boat Again.'

Do you know what song I've sung the last two weeks as I've studied for this lesson? 'On the road again...I just can't wait to get on the road again...' I'm not a singer, I'm not a music fan, but every time I see this phrase, 'in the boat again,' I just think about Willie Nelson and wanting to get 'on the road again.' That's kind of His theme. If you were an early disciple, one of the twelve, here would have been the theme of your ministry, 'in the boat again, just can't wait to get in the boat again.' They're in the boat again! In this first half, the gospel strategy is Jesus getting the disciples in a boat and taking them somewhere they've never been! Now they're in that boat again. Watch this. Next week, we're going to end the first half, and we go into the locker room and come back the next week; we aren't going to see the boat again. Jesus is going to set His face toward Jerusalem, and they're not going to be on the water again. He's going to a cross and He's going to die. Only at the cross do you really know who He is. But when you're in the boat alone with Jesus and it's just a few of you, you can't hide. You can't do what some of you are doing right now. You're just trying to hide in a crowd. No, not when it's just a few.

So, here's what Mark tells us about these disciples. Now remember, Mark is getting this firsthand from Peter; Peter is his source. They forgot to bring bread and they only had one loaf. Can I ask you this question? How can you be in an event where Jesus feeds four thousand people, there are seven trash bag size baskets left over, and a couple of you don't grab five or six loaves? I'm sure their society was different than our society, because if we had been there, we would have grabbed one just to have brought home and put on a shelf so that when somebody come over to our house and asked what that piece of bread was doing on that shelve. 'Oh, let me tell you what happened! I was there when Jesus fed four thousand people and there's a fragment of the bread that's left!' We would put it in a glass case, we would make a little plaque for it; am I telling the truth? Yes! They only have one loaf, they're in the boat, and Mark tells us, setting the

context of this story, they are in the boat again with Jesus, and they've only got one loaf of bread.

I'm reading this story and here's what I'm thinking...that's pretty cool. Can we do the math? Five thousand men besides women and children. Let's suppose He only fed the men and didn't feed the women and children, He had five loaves, five thousand men, that's one thousand people per loaf He fed. Let's throw in the wife and kids. Five loaves fed between twenty and twenty-five thousand people, so that means with each loaf, He fed somewhere between four and five thousand people. We just saw Him go into Gentile territory just a few days ago, we saw Him take seven loaves and feed four thousand people. Let's do the math. These are not men besides women and children; these are real people, four thousand people with seven loaves. That means per loaf, He fed five hundred seventy one and a half people. That half person got bread too. Get this picture. My Jesus, who I'm following, who I'm in the boat with, took one loaf and fed a thousand to five thousand people, and then took another loaf and fed at least five hundred seventy one and a half people, and now I've got one loaf in the boat and there's just twelve of us. I am praising God we've got a loaf of bread, amen! No, I'm praising God we've got Jesus in the boat! It doesn't matter if we've just got a fragment of a loaf; it's just twelve of us. If this guy can take a loaf and feed five thousand, another loaf and feed four thousand, it's going to be no problem for Him to feed us.

Jesus knows what they're thinking. All they're thinking about is themselves. All they're thinking about is their physical needs being met. Not a one of them got it that when He was having this encounter with the Pharisees, they didn't understand the spiritual battle that was taking place. So Jesus, knowing they have but one loaf of bread but they think they don't have any bread, He looked at them in the boat and said beware. Watch out. Watch out for the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod. Don't read Mark through the lens of Matthew and Luke. Mark wrote his gospel first. Matthew is writing to Jewish people, Luke is writing to a Gentile named Theophilus, so they put a different slant on this story. Mark just warns the people about the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod. You've got to remember, in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, leaven became a symbol for evil. So when the Jewish people

would get ready to do some of their holy feasts, they had to rid their homes, lives, and diet of leaven. That became the symbol of sin, the symbol of evil. Here's what Jesus is teaching. He's saying watch out. Watch out for the evil influence of the Pharisees. Watch out for the evil influence of Herod.

Here's what I think Mark is doing. I think Mark is doing this for the church. I don't want to offend anybody, but if I offend you, it's on you, not me. Today, we've got to be careful about the evil influence of legalistic people who believe they're right with God because they're earning a right relationship with Him through works when in reality they're not. Those people today still don't understand the grace of God. Sometimes, if you're a performance-based person, you feel so good when you just check a few boxes and read the Scriptures and do the right thing. You can follow the Lord to the letter of the law, but miss and violate the spirit of the law. That's who the Pharisees were. Who was Herod? He was the ruler. There are a lot of people that not only put their faith in humanistic religion; there are a lot of people who put their faith in politics. Jesus is warning us about the leaven of human, legalistic systems that try to be right in the eye of God, and He warns us about following politicians. He says beware! What He's trying to say here is you had better watch out for any system that stands opposed to Him.

Now, here the disciples are, it's getting to the end of the first half of their ministry, their life with Jesus, and they're down. They're not looking very good. Jesus doesn't want them going back; He wants them to continue to go forward. Then He looked at them and said, are you kidding me? He didn't really say that...He said, are you really thinking about not having bread? Do you not perceive? Do you not understand? Are your hearts this hard? Do you have eyes that do not see? Do you have ears that just don't hear? Do you not remember? Weren't you with Me when I fed the five thousand men? When that was over, how many baskets did you pick up? They said twelve. Then He said, weren't you with Me just a few days ago when I fed the four thousand? How many big baskets did you pick up? They said seven. Jesus looked at them and finishes the story by saying, do you still not understand? Remember this. This is historically true. The

gospels aren't a diary. Mark is taking the life of Christ and recording it in a manner to touch a Gentile church.

Here's what I think as I read this story. How could you be in the boat again with Jesus and do what you just did? Are you with me? Who has the biggest opportunity as a Christian, the twelve literally walked with Jesus while He was here, or those of us who don't have Jesus beside us in the boat, but have the Holy Spirit of God, the third person of the triune God inside us? If we look at these guys and go, are you kidding me? How do you not get it? How do you do what you still do? Do you reckon God ever looks at some of us and wonders the same thing? How could I have put My Son on a cross, Him die for your sins, put My Spirit in you who is holy, and you have to grieve Him and quench Him to do what you just did, and yet, you still do it? Does it make sense? This is being written to give us hope, and the hope is that we can live the life the disciples didn't live because they won't fully get it until Jesus dies on a cross. You and I have never lived on that side; we've only lived on this side. Why did Mark put this together the way he did? He put it together for this. He wants the church to not only believe that Jesus Christ died for the sin of the whole world, Jew and Gentile; He wants us to know He died for us individually. Many of us trust the salvation of the nations to God, but we don't trust God in our day-to-day life. You can feed five thousand and you can feed four thousand, but you can't feed us in the boat. Some of you believe God feeds others, but He can't feed you.

Can we make this personal? I don't get it. I don't get how you can watch Jesus feed five thousand and a little while later not get that He can feed these four thousand. I really don't get how you don't think He can take one loaf and feed twelve. How many time has He done something for you, and then a month, two months, a year later, you're right back doubting His provision? Some of us are still worried about the same thing we were worried about five, ten, years ago. What's even worse is some of us are still struggling with the same things we struggled with ten years ago, five years ago, or a year ago. I just have to ask this question. Do you get it? Do you have eyes that really see? Do you have spiritual ears that really hear? Do you have a heart that's being molded and fashioned by God, that's moving further and further from the image of Adam and more and more

into the image of Jesus Christ? As I read this story, there is still time for the disciples. Here's the question you need to ask yourself. Do I have time? You only have time if you start today.