



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Gospel According to St. Mark

Chapter 8

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Introduction

- Chapters 8-10 address several questions, some of which are posed by the Lord Himself, some by the disciples, and on certain occasions, by the multitude or by the adversaries
- They all reveal something about the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ
- In this chapter, there are questions on showing a sign from heaven; the disciples understanding of Him; and about His identity



Introduction

Chapter Outline

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Feeding the Four Thousand

8:1-10



- The Lord had blessed the bread and two fish to feed 5000 men, besides women and children, 6:34-44
- Now, another opportunity came by, when the multitude stayed with Him for three days, having nothing to eat; the Lord, likewise, declined to send them away hungry, lest *they will faint on the way; for some of them have come from afar.*”
- Jesus challenges the disciples understanding of His true identity with a second feeding miracle

Feeding the Four Thousand

8:1-10



- The feeding miracle of the five thousand (not counting women and children) is retold in all four Gospels, Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:31-34; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-13
- However, only the Gospels of Matthew and Mark present both miracle feedings of the five thousand and the four thousand
- *I have compassion on the multitude*, Christ is a compassionate Savior both of the bodies and souls of men
- He shared His concern for the flesh without sacrificing the spiritual

Feeding the Four Thousand

8:1-10



- *How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?* The question here is the same as when He fed the five thousand, but perhaps they now meant no more by it than that they do not have the means of feeding the multitude
- And modestly leaving the Lord to decide what was to be done?
- But St. Matthew, 15:33 gives the question lack of faith "*Where could we get enough bread in the wilderness to fill such a great multitude?*"
- The disciples, measuring the difficulty by human reason, thought that it was impossible to find so many loaves in the desert

Feeding the Four Thousand

8:1-10



- But Christ in this necessity, when human resources fail, supplies Divine; and meanwhile the disciples' estimate of the impossibility illustrates the greatness of the miracle
- In the former miracle of the multiplying of the loaves, Mark 6:35, we find that their stock consisted of five loaves and two fishes
- It was, of course, just as easy for our Lord to multiply the smaller quantity as the larger
- But He chose so the original quantity of food, as well as the number requiring to be fed, should in each case be different, in order that it might be evident that they were different occasions, although the miracles were of the same kind

Feeding the Four Thousand

8:1-10



- Christ indeed, as God, was able of His own will and by His own power to multiply the loaves
- But as man He gave thanks
- The prayers and thanksgiving are a proclamation of His fellowship with God
- It looks, by this account, as if the fishes were blessed, and distributed separately, after the blessing, breaking, and distribution of the bread

Feeding the Four Thousand

8:1-10



- After the multitude had eaten and were filled, they did not take the remains
- The disciples collected the leftover as in the former miracle of the multiplication of the loaves
- By this circumstance we are taught to be content with what is sufficient, and to seek no unnecessary supplies
- We may likewise learn from this amazing miracle the providence of God and His goodness, who does not send us away empty, but wishes all to be nourished and enriched with His grace

Feeding the Four Thousand

8:1-10



- Thus does our Lord verify in His works what He has promised in His instructions; that if we will seek in the first instance the kingdom of God and His justice, that all necessary things shall be added unto us
- By the gathering up of the fragments that remained, He not only made the miracle more striking to the multitude and to the apostles, but has also left us a practical lesson, how, in the midst of plenty, which proceeds from the benevolence of heaven, we must use a prudent frugality

Feeding the Four Thousand

8:1-10



- This miracle, and also the former of the same kind, recorded Mark 6:40, were intended to demonstrate, that Christ was the true bread which comes down from heaven
- For He who was almighty to create bread without means to support natural life, could not want power to create bread without means to support spiritual life
- And this heavenly bread we stand so much in need of every moment, that we ought to be always praying, “Lord, evermore give us this bread”

Feeding the Four Thousand

8:1-10



- *those who had eaten were about four thousand*, Since the count is for all those eating and Mark does not specify "men," the whole crowd of "people" rather than only men is understood
- Here as in case of first feeding there is a crossing of the lake immediately after which has an obvious reason in first case when Jesus came to them walking on water
- This time Jesus and the Twelve enter the boat together, at least in St. Mark's narrative
- *Dalmanutha*, In Matthew, 15:39, it is *the region of Magdala*

Feeding the Four Thousand 8:1-10



- Magdala and Dalmanutha were both on the western shore of the lake, and probably not far apart
- From the former the surname "Magdalene" was probably taken, to denote the residence of Mary Magdalene
- We cannot ignore the close resemblance between the two miracles included in chapters 6 and 8
- Feeding 5000 men (6:35-44) Feeding 4000 men (8:1-9)
- Crossing the lake (6:45-52) Crossing the lake (8:10)
- Crossing to Gennesaret (6:53-56) Crossing to Dalmanutha (8:10)

Feeding the Four Thousand

8:1-10



- A dispute with the Pharisees about the unwashed hands (7:1-23)
- A dispute with the Pharisees about a sign from heaven (8:11)
- Conversation with the Phoenician woman about the children's bread (7:24-30)
- Conversation with the disciples about the leaven of Pharisees (8:13-21)
- Healing of the deaf mute (7:31-37) Healing of the blind (8: 22 - 26)

Feeding the Four Thousand

8:1-10



- The first miracle of feeding the 5000 is proclaiming the Person of the Messiah, the fulfiller of the Jews, the keepers of the Law; the second, on the other hand, is proclaiming the Person of the Messiah as the fulfiller of the Gentiles as well
- Some scholars see in number 7 (7 loaves), a reference to the 70 disciples, who carried out the preaching task among the Gentiles; and to the 7 deacons (Acts 6:3)
- Several others see in number 7 a reference to the works of the Holy Spirit in the Church of Christ

The Pharisees Seek a Sign

8:11-12



- The Pharisees regard Jesus' miracles as ambiguous actions whose legitimacy must be confirmed by *a sign from heaven* to verify His authority, which is what they now demand
- Their *testing* refers to the Biblical provision of testing to determine if a prophet has been sent by God, Deuteronomy 13:2-6; 18:18-22
- St. John Chrysostom says, "They asked for a sign, not to believe, but to test Him. If the adversaries had been ready to receive faith, He would have given them the sign they asked for."
- Jesus is grieved at the lack of faith of *this generation*

The Pharisees Seek a Sign

8:11-12



- He has already given many signs of authority in His healing of the sick, healing the physically disabled, in casting out demons, and even in raising the dead that the prophets prophesied were to be the "signs" of the Messiah, Isaiah 26:19, 35:5-6
- He sighs deeply because He knows that no matter what "sign" He gives that His opponents will still refuse to believe
- Their whole purpose in this confrontation is to discredit Jesus with the people
- The Pharisees have already made up their minds as to the origin of Jesus' miracles

The Pharisees Seek a Sign

8:11-12



- He sees that the generation, which should have been preaching the Gospel and teaching the world about salvation through the Cross, had deviated from that mission to testing the Lord, as did their fathers before them
- This deep sigh was because of the hardness of their hearts, the malignity of their minds, and insincerity of their intentions; who had no view to come at truth by this inquiry, but to trap Him
- The Evangelist Matthew adds, *but the sign of the Prophet Jonas*, Matthew 16:4, 12:40

Beware of the Leaven of the Pharisees and Herod 8:13-21



- Again and again our Lord crossed this sea, that He might instruct the Galileans dwelling on either side; in fulfillment of Isaiah 9:1, *"The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,... by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light."*
- Even the disciples, after the miracle of the feeding of the multitude, have not yet opened their eyes to realize that in their midst was *"the Bread of Life"* (John 6:51) which satisfies the whole Church and grants it the unity of Spirit, according to the words of the apostle: *"For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread."* (1 Corinthians 10:17)

Beware of the Leaven of the Pharisees and Herod 8:13-21



- In this exchange with His Apostles, which follows Jesus' discussion with the Pharisees who demanded a sign of Jesus' divine authority, Jesus begins with a warning concerning the "leaven/yeast" of the Pharisees and Herodians
- It is the Pharisees and Herodians who are planning Jesus' death, Mark 3:6
- Leaven in Scripture, with the single exception of the Parable, Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20-21, is always a symbol of evil, 1 Corinthians 5:6-8; Galatians 5:9

Beware of the Leaven of the Pharisees and Herod 8:13-21



- Our Lord speaks of “leaven;” and the mention of this word reminds the disciples that they had forgotten to bring bread with them in the boat
- And fearing lest Christ should direct them to land on some desert shore
- They were in some anxiety how they might obtain what they would need; and so they disputed among themselves; one, it may be, throwing the blame upon another

Beware of the Leaven of the Pharisees and Herod 8:13-21



- *Is your heart still hardened?*, The question is peculiar to St. Mark, as are also the two first questions in Mark 8:18
- The expression of hurt astonishment is characteristically more vivid and emphatic in St. Mark's report
- It might have been expected, that by a second miracle of the loaves, their understandings would have been more enlightened, and their faith increased, and that they would have relinquished their unpleasant notions, their anxieties, doubts, and unbelief

Beware of the Leaven of the Pharisees and Herod 8:13-21



- It is as though He said, "Why do you reason because you have no bread, as though I was referring to natural things, and speaking concerning bread for the body, and wishing you to be anxious about that; as though I could not provide that for you, if necessary, just as easily here on the sea as I did just now in the desert?"
- The few questions following each other in rapid succession, Mark 8:17-21, show how deeply He was hurt at this want of spiritual apprehension, and worse still, their low thoughts of Him, as if He would utter so fervent a warning on so petty a subject

Beware of the Leaven of the Pharisees and Herod 8:13-21



- Here St. Mark is as careful as St. Matthew to mention the details of the two miracles, even to the reference to the two kinds of baskets in which the fragments were gathered up
- They had a distinct recollection of the facts, but they had failed to catch their spiritual significance
- It is as though our Lord said, "You ought to have perceived, both from My words and from My actions, that I was not speaking concerning earthly leaven or earthly bread, but concerning spiritual doctrine."

Beware of the Leaven of the Pharisees and Herod 8:13-21



- St. Matthew here, Matthew 16:12 is careful to tell us that this reproof of Christ quickened their intellects, and forced them to understand
- The two evangelists Matthew 16:12 and Luke 12:1 interpret the leaven of the Pharisees as their hypocrisy
- St. Cyril the Great says, “Hypocrisy is hated by God and men; it never pays a reward, and never saves a soul, but actually ends in its destruction. If somebody uses hypocrisy to get away with something he has done, that would be only for a limited time, after which he would be surely exposed and defamed ... Nothing done or said is hidden from the Divine eyes, Luke 12:2”

A Blind Man Healed at Bethsaida 8:22-26



- The village of Bethsaida was located at the northern tip of the Sea of Galilee
- In the healing of the blind man, Jesus is demonstrating His command that the people should "hear" and "see" so they can "understand" as He did in the healing of the deaf man in Mark 7:31-37 after the earlier feeding miracle
- Once again, as in the healing of the blind man, the healing occurs as part of a process

A Blind Man Healed at Bethsaida 8:22-26



- Our Savior sometimes used some signs in His miraculous work, sometimes He used none, sometimes He laid His hands upon them, sometimes He took them by the hand
- The process that Jesus used in His healing of the blind man was:
 1. Jesus takes the man outside the village
 2. Jesus uses His spit in the process of healing and lays His hands on the man
 3. The man sees unclearly at first
 4. Jesus lays His hands on the man's eyes a second time and the man's sight is restored

A Blind Man Healed at Bethsaida 8:22-26



- *led him out of the town*, Our Lord "led" the blind man out of Beth-saida, for the same reason that He led the deaf and mute man, Mark 7:33 away from the multitude
- Perhaps to pray more intently and earnestly
- Or perhaps that He might avoid vain-glory and human praise, and teach us to reject it also
- *And when He had spit on his eyes*, This act had a mystical meaning; it was the instrument by which His Deity operated - and laid His hands upon him

A Blind Man Healed at Bethsaida 8:22-26



- The cure was wrought gradually, which was not usual in our Lord's miracles
- It is the only recorded example of a progressive cure
- Christ showed in what method those commonly are healed by His grace, who by nature are spiritually blind
- At first, their knowledge is confused; but, like the light of the morning, it shines more and more to the perfect day, and then they see all things clearly

A Blind Man Healed at Bethsaida 8:22-26



- It has been suggested also that the gradual restoration of sight in this case was meant to symbolize the slowness of the Twelve in attaining spiritual insight
- They got their eyes opened very gradually like the blind man of Bethsaida
- *Neither go into the town,* To avoid creating a sensation
- *nor tell anyone in the town,* The reason of this was not merely or only because Christ would have the miracle concealed; but chiefly because the inhabitants of this place were notorious for their unbelief

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ 8:27-30



- Caesarea Philippi was a collection of four villages that Herod Philip (another of Herod the Great's sons) rebuilt into a large Hellenistic city, naming it after the Roman emperor and adding his own name
- Our Lord led His disciples away from familiar ground into the comparative seclusion of the country round Caesarea Philippi, in order to tell them plainly of His death
- He knew how terrible the announcement would be, and He desired to make it in some quiet spot, where there would be collectedness and leisure to let it sink into their mind

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ 8:27-30



- Jesus asked them the question not that He needed any information of this; for He knew not only what was said by men but what was in them
- But He put this question, in order to bring out their sense of, and faith in Him
- And to reveal something to them which was necessary they should be acquainted with as we read in Matthew 16:13, where it is read, "*Who do men say that I, the Son of Man am?*"
- The time was come to test the faith of the disciples thoroughly

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ 8:27-30



- Herod, and those that followed him, judged Christ to be John the Baptist raised from the dead, or to have the soul of John the Baptist clothed with other flesh
- Others conceived Him to be Elijah, of whom they were in expectation that he should come before the Messiah
- Others thought He was Jeremiah, as Matthew says, or one of the old prophets
- They could not tell what to determine of one who appeared to them in the shape of a man, but did such things as none could do, but by a Divine power

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ 8:27-30



- Christ asked them the question one more time as He was warning His disciples that they who had been better instructed ought to think greater things of Him than these
- It was necessary that He should show them that these current opinions and floating notions were far below His real claims
- Therefore, He says with emphasis, *But who do you say that I am?*
- You, My disciples, who, being always with Me, have seen Me do far greater things than they; you, who have listened to My teaching, confirmed as it has been by those miracles; you, who yourselves also have been enabled to work many miracles in My name; *who do you say that I am?*

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ 8:27-30



- Peter gives his profession of faith that Jesus is the promised Messiah
- Jesus demanded the sense of His disciples which is here given by Peter in their name, and which was right; and on account of which He declared Peter blessed and ascribed his knowledge of Him not to flesh and blood but to the revelation of His Father, Matthew 16:17
- St. Luke reports no more of this than Mark, but Matthew reports it much larger, giving us a further reply of Christ to Peter, Matthew 16:16

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ 8:27-30



- *Then He strictly warned them,* A strong word, implying almost rebuke
- *they should tell no one about Him.,* Why was this?
- There were many reasons for this discretion
- Those who were favorable to His cause would have wanted at once to take Him by force and make Him a king
- In fact, some of them made no secret of their intentions, John 6:15

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ 8:27-30



- Those, on the other hand, who were opposed to Him were only watching their opportunity to destroy Him
- Moreover, His own disciples had yet many things to learn
- And besides all this, faith in His Godhead would be easier when His death should have been followed by His glorious resurrection and ascension
- St. Ambrose says, “He warned the disciples not to preach about Him simply as the Son of God, but as the crucified Son of Man. This is the splendor of faith, to apprehend the truth of the Cross of Christ! It is only the Cross of Christ that is of benefit to me.”



Jesus Predicts His Death and Resurrection 8:31-33

- The question and the answer were preparatory to strange and mournful tidings, which He now began to reveal distinctly to the Apostles respecting Himself, for clear and full before His eyes was the whole history of His coming sufferings
- From the beginning He had given hints, gradually increasing in clearness; and now the time had come for full disclosure
- Now the disciples are convinced that Jesus is the Christ; they may bear to hear of His sufferings, of which Christ here begins to give them notice



Jesus Predicts His Death and Resurrection 8:31-33

- And it was necessary that the disciples should be thus instructed in His amazing dignity as the Son of God, lest, when they saw Him put to death, they might doubt as to His Godhead
- In sharing this secret with the disciples, Jesus is correcting the common misperception that the Messiah is coming in triumph and glory to defeat and crush Israel's enemies and to re-establish the kingdom on earth just as it had been in the past in the glory days of kings David and Solomon



Jesus Predicts His Death and Resurrection 8:31-33

- Jesus' revelation of His suffering and death in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecies of the Suffering Servant, Isaiah 52:13-53:12 marks a new phase in Jesus' ministry, as Mark introduces the revelation of Jesus' Passion with the phrase *He began to teach them*
- Why does Peter resist what Jesus has told the disciples about His suffering and death, and why does Jesus rebuke him so harshly in front of the others?



Jesus Predicts His Death and Resurrection 8:31-33

- It was not possible for Peter to apprehend the Person of Christ as a Redeemer to be crucified for the sake of humanity because that was completely rejected by the Jewish way of thinking
- Thus the Lord Christ hastened to correct that concept
- Jesus gives Peter the same rebuke that He gave Satan in Matthew 4:10
- The Hebrew word *satan* means adversary
- Whenever one stands as an adversary to God's plan for man's salvation, that person is indeed acting as Satan in human form

Take Up the Cross and Follow Him 8:34-38



- Our Lord now, without any further special reference to St. Peter, delivers a lesson of universal application
- This self-denial ought to extend to everything, even to life itself, which we ought to be willing to leave, if need be, for the sake of Christ
- It is as though He said, "Let him take up his cross, as I have endured and borne my cross, that I might be the standard-bearer and Leader of all cross-bearers - I, who carried the cross on which I was to be crucified to the mount of Calvary"

Take Up the Cross and Follow Him 8:34-38



- St. Luke 9:23 adds the word "daily"
- Thus showing that "every day" and often "at every hour"
- Continually carrying it through our whole life
- This cross assumes various forms; such as persecution and martyrdom, affliction and sorrow of whatever kind, appointed by God
- Temptations of Satan are permitted by God for our trial to increase our humility and virtue, and to make our crown brighter

Take Up the Cross and Follow Him 8:34-38



- Jesus says that true discipleship is based on:
 1. The willingness "to deny" selfish desires by daily dying to oneself in order to live for Christ
 2. Being willingly "to take" and endure those struggles/crosses that are necessary
 3. "To follow" Jesus' teachings faithfully and obediently in service to Christ and His Kingdom
- Because the cross is sharp and afflicting, our Lord motivates and encourages His followers to bear it by the thought of its great and everlasting rewards

Take Up the Cross and Follow Him 8:34-38



- He who by trying to avoid the cross and to escape self-denial would save his life here, will lose it hereafter
- But he who loses his life here for the sake of Christ, either by dying in his cause or by denying and mortifying his lusts out of love for Him, he in the life to come shall find his life in the bosom of Christ and in eternal joy
- St. Augustine says: “If man, through his love for himself, is lost, surely through denying himself, he will be found!... Man should withdraw from himself, not for worldly affairs, but to get attached to God.”

Take Up the Cross and Follow Him 8:34-38



- *profit a man*, In the long run, in the issue of things, who by denying Christ, and His Gospel, may not only save his life for the present, but gain for himself great riches and wealth
- *loses his own soul*, Which is immortal and everlasting, when the world, and the glory of it pass away, and so is of more worth than the whole world
- The world can only be enjoyed for a season, and that with a great deal of fatigue and trouble

Take Up the Cross and Follow Him 8:34-38



- But the soul continues for ever; and if it is lost, its torment always abides, and the smoke of it ascends for ever, its worm never dies, and its fire is never quenched
- *in exchange* , To purchase back
- By soul here is meant “life” in the higher sense
- The “price” which the earthly-minded man gives for the world is his soul
- It has been bought and redeemed with the precious blood of Christ; therefore the whole world would be a poor price for the soul of one man

Take Up the Cross and Follow Him 8:34-38



- To deliver the soul out of its miserable state and condition; all the riches of the world, and the whole world itself, are not an equivalent to it, or a sufficient ransom for it
- Riches will not profit in the day of wrath, or deliver a soul from condemnation, and ruin
- Wherefore, if he had the whole world, he could not redeem his soul with it; and he has nothing else to give for it, and therefore it is past all recovery
- Whosoever shall refuse, through pride or wickedness, to acknowledge and serve Christ here, shall be excluded from His kingdom hereafter

Take Up the Cross and Follow Him 8:34-38



- He who may have seemed lowly, meek, and despised; will come again as the Son of God, in majesty and glory
- They that would not acknowledge Him here must be rejected by Him there
- They that would not serve Him on earth will not enjoy His favor in heaven
- They that would cast Him out and despise Him must be cast out by Him, and consigned to eternal, hopeless sorrow

Take Up the Cross and Follow Him 8:34-38



- *Whosoever*, The word includes all, whatever their position or circumstances may be
- *in this adulterous and sinful generation*, It adds to the disgrace of being ashamed of Christ that the shame is manifested in the presence of the dishonorable and the worthless
- Therefore our Lord exhibits the contrast between the mean and disgraceful people in the presence of whom men are ashamed of Him here, and the magnificent assemblage in whose presence He will be ashamed of them hereafter
- What a difference!

Take Up the Cross and Follow Him 8:34-38



- The cross of Christ appeared to the great body of mankind to be shameful and disgraceful
- To the Jews it was a stumbling-block, and to the Greek's foolishness
- Hence vast numbers, whether through shame or fear, did not dare to confess it, and still less to preach it
- And therefore it is that St. Paul says, Romans 1:16 *"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ."*



Discussion

- What is the most probable view of the symbolism that underlies the two miracles of the loaves and the number of baskets collected in each?
- Why do you think the disciples ask virtually the same question when confronted with an almost identical situation in terms of a huge crowd and no food?
- People are still asking for signs today! Why aren't the signs Jesus did, plus his amazing resurrection, sufficient?



Discussion

- Why does Jesus heal the blind man in stages?
- Why do you think that Jesus told the blind man, now healed, not to go into the village? How might Jesus want to separate you from your surroundings, and why?
- Why does Jesus come back with such strong words to Peter?



Discussion

- How can a person who wants to save his life actually lose it? How can a person who loses his life for the sake of Jesus actually save it? What do the verbs “saving” and “losing” mean in these paradoxes?
- What does denying yourself, taking up your cross and following Jesus actually mean for you?
- Why are we sometimes shy or ashamed of Jesus and His words?