

Homiletical Project, Exegesis of Mark
Mark Rubin
Box 1091

Diagnosing Calcium Deposits on the Heart
(i.e. hardness of heart)
Mark 8:14-21

Introduction:

When was the last time that you observed the frustration of a parent showing their child how to do something? Like fathers painstakingly showing sons how to impale the writhing worm on the Eagle Claw hook so that the brook trout don't get free snacks at the expense of an empty bait box. Or how about when little Freddy is trying to improve his bike jumping techniques, and goes off the ramp half-cocked and wipes out? Dad was there to pick him up and comfort him (not to mention placing him back on the bike with more precise instruction on how to do the inevitable disastrous event once more!). Days later, will little Freddy forget his dad's help, when this time he is catapulted from his swing after attempting one complete revolution and pulling excessive G's in his "F-14 simulator"? Did he not see and hear his dad's comfort and help the previous time? Will that come to mind this time?

Context:

Prior to Mark 8:14-21 Jesus had worked two miracles of feeding five thousand and four thousand people on separate occasions. And the disciples had been present both times, in the serving and then collecting of the basketfuls of remains. They had seen what Jesus did and they heard his words on both occasions! Now when hunger is theirs, they had lost sight of what Jesus' hands had worked not long before.

Let's look at the questions that Jesus asked the disciples to see if they had learned the lesson from the feedings of the multitudes.

I. Do you **still** not see or understand? (8:17)

The disciples now only had one loaf with them, and being 13 (counting Jesus) in the boat meant that it wasn't quite enough to go around. This led to a discussion between the disciples about not having bread. Their focus was on their lack of bread. If we will all be honest, food shortages or delays put us all in foul moods. It's not a modern day problem alone! Jesus caught the disciples in the act of arguing over bread, despite witnessing earlier events (see 8:1ff). It was not a lack of verifiable, observable data that the disciples needed. It was a lack of comprehension. Notice what the text says, "Do you still not see or understand?" (8:17). Verses 17 and 18 are a series of questions that Jesus asks to bring to light the attitude and shortcoming of the disciples in light of the miracles he had just worked.

1. You do realize what Jesus did in his miracle, don't you?

What Jesus asked the disciples was, "Have your hearts been hardened?" (8:17). They knew he did the miracle, because they had to clean up after it. The problem was it hadn't lodged in their mind. Their present lack of bread didn't bring to mind what they had seen.

2. You did see with your eyes and hear with your ears, didn't you?

This question by Jesus is very close to what is recorded in Jer. 5:21; Ezek. 12:2; and Is. 6:9. Is it possible that Jesus was hinting at the fact that the disciples were like the ones mentioned, the ones hard of heart? They see, they hear, but it's not sinking in!

3. You did witness the event, and did remember it didn't you?

Twice the feedings happened and they were there. Their answers to Jesus' review of the miracles demonstrate that they remembered. But their

heart was dull because they didn't learn the lesson that Jesus did the miraculous/supernatural! They couldn't get away with what recent figures of the political scene have, "I have no recollection of that. I can't remember. I'm not saying I wasn't there. I'm not saying I forgot, it just isn't coming to my remembrance."

II. Do you **still** not understand? (8:21)

The review of the miracles is walked through by two questions of how many basket-fulls were picked up. No mention of how many loaves and fishes were started with is given or asked by Jesus. His entire focus is on how much was left over. He doesn't even mention the fish! By asking about the bread, he is connecting to the problem present of not having bread, and the true problem that the disciples had not learned the lesson of the miracles.

1. How many baskets full of left-overs were there the first time? (8:19)

What does Jesus emphasize concerning the left-overs? How many baskets were full. He is focusing upon the end and the over-abundance of his miraculous working. It wasn't, "looks like you just made enough, Jesus! We just got one little loaf that dropped on the ground left."

2. How many baskets full of left-overs were there the second time?

(8:20). Each time there was more than enough. It was nothing like a pot-luck where the food runs thin at the end. Jesus made way more than was necessary! And the disciples forgot it! After the review is when he asked again, "Do you still not understand? Put it in your day-planner; write yourself post-it-notes. But remember what happened! The point of what Jesus is talking about in this event is, "I made basket-fulls of extra bread and you argue over one stinkin' loaf!" Today we would call the diagnosis of the disciples "brain-dead" or "bonehead". Jesus asked if it was a hard or dull heart.

had eyes and ears. Also they remembered how many baskets were picked up afterwards. But in their anticipated affirmation, Jesus says, μ ? “You don’t quite get it do you?”

In fashioning the main points out of the questions of Jesus, I hope that the listener will remember better what Jesus asked, and truly learn what the importance was of the over-abundance in the feeding.

The text does clarify that Jesus didn’t just ask how many baskets they picked up, but how many μ were there? I agree with Gundry in his commentary (pg. 410, 415) that there is an emphasis on the “superabundance” of the miracle, and not on the daily provision. The urge will be present for the preacher and reader of the text to connect Jesus to the daily provider. This is not untrue, but the text doesn’t focus on the 1 loaf the disciples had. Jesus spends almost the entirety of his discourse on his miracle with the bread.

In choosing what text to teach from, I chose the NET Bible. I like the RSV rendering in Mark 8:11-21, but the textual variant in 8:16 in NA 27th for (μ - attested by Majority text; A C L) is given (“we have no bread”). The evidence and even the meaning can possibly go either way, i.e. it is not a life-death issue at stake. But no where in this pericope does Mark give direct discourse of the disciples, until Jesus asks about the basket-fulls. Matthew in his parallel (16:6ff) does record that the disciples misunderstood what Jesus’ reasoning was for the mention of the leaven. Here in Mark, I’ll stick to the reading of NA27 on this matter of μ vs. μ .

The treatment in the NET Bible of 8:18 also reflects the understanding of the concession use of the verbal participle (Wallace, p. 634). Wallace’s treatment of this participle says that “the state or action of the main verb is true in spite of the state or action of the participle.” Thus the translation

would be 'although.' The NET Bible reflects this usage. It's not an issue of eye and hearing exams. The seeing and hearing is happening, but whether there is comprehension is another matter.

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