

Why Are We So Slow to Listen and Learn?

Devotional #15, Mark 8:1-21

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, ² "I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. ³ 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." ⁴ And his disciples answered him, "How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?" ⁵ And he asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven." ⁶ 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. ⁷ And they had a few small fish. And having blessed them, he said that these also should be set before them. ⁸ And they ate and were satisfied. And they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. ⁹ And there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away. ¹⁰ And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.

¹¹ The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him. ¹² 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." ¹³ And he left them, got into the boat again, and went to the other side.

¹⁴ Now they had forgotten to bring bread, and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. ¹⁵ And he cautioned them, saying, "Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." ¹⁶ And they began discussing with one another the fact that they had no bread. ¹⁷ 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? ¹⁸ Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember? ¹⁹ 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." ²⁰ "And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?" And they said to him, "Seven." ²¹ And he said to them, "Do you not yet understand?"

- Mark 8:1-21, ESV

It's easy to be very judgmental when reading today's passage in Mark. If we remember that Jesus has already fed a crowd of more than 5,000 people from five loaves and two fish, we have to shake our heads and wonder: Did the disciples really ask Jesus, "How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?"

Then, after Jesus feeds the 4,000 with seven loaves of bread and a few fish, the disciples are confused by Jesus' warning against the leaven of the Pharisees. They think Jesus is rebuking them for not bringing any bread! Really? Have they not learned yet that they don't need to worry about where their next meal is coming from?

Then, just when we're feeling so superior, we should step back and take a look at our own lives and our own hearts. How many times has God provided exactly what we need when we need it? How many times has He shown His grace to be sufficient? And how many times have we missed an important spiritual lesson because our minds were on our stomachs instead of on the kingdom of God?

So, with some perspective, we can see that we are just as clueless as the disciples. But why? Jesus says it is because of our sin and because of a lack of spiritual enlightenment. Our hearts are hard. Our eyes cannot see and our ears cannot hear what they should. What we need is something only the Holy Spirit can apply

to us: redemption! We need our sin removed, our hearts softened to be responsive to God, our eyes opened and our ears unstopped. Only then will we be able to truly see, hear and respond to God as we should.

The good news is that Jesus has already accomplished our redemption and the Holy Spirit will apply full redeeming grace to the hearts, eyes and ears of believers as we trust in Jesus! When we stay in the Word, stay on our knees, and stay in fellowship with other believers, God changes us from the inside out.