

MARK 8 – THE LIGHT THAT SHINES IN THE DARKNESS

How many of you have ever had the experience of being in total darkness? Maybe you were in a cave or in a really dark room somewhere. What is it that you saw when your eyes were wide open? Blackness. Just blackness in every direction – a very uneasy feeling. Well, in a spiritual sense total darkness is the condition of the world. But most people don't realize it.

Paul describes sinful humanity's lost condition like this: "They know the truth about God because He has made it obvious to them. For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see His invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature. So, they have no excuse for not knowing God. Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship Him as God or even give Him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused. Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools." (Romans 1:19-22 NLT). In the ESV, v 21 says, "their foolish hearts were darkened."

So, spiritually speaking sinful humanity is in total darkness. They are spiritually blind and foolish. Second Corinthians 4:4 tells us that the god of darkness, Satan, who rules this world has blinded the minds of those who do not believe." So then, if someone is in a total state of darkness, what is it that they need most? Light. If you are down in a cave where it is completely dark and you turn on a flashlight or light a lantern or candle, some form of light, you will be able to see something. Maybe not a whole lot, but you will be able to see something, which is better than nothing.

John 1:5 (NASB) says, "The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it." Of course, John is speaking here in this passage of Jesus, right? His introduction to the Gospel of John is all about who John understands Jesus to be, having been His disciple for all those three and a half years.

This morning's lesson is entitled, "The Light That Shines in the Darkness." In Mark Chapter 8, Jesus is going to encounter darkness, in the form of both spiritual and physical blindness. Jesus will show those who are in the dark that HE is the source of light that they need. Mark Chapter 8...

READ Mark 8:1-3

Jesus is still in that same Gentile region of Decapolis – the same place we saw Him in our last lesson. For three days He has been talking to a large crowd. Just imagine the kind of teacher that Jesus must have been to keep this crowd hanging around for three days listening to what He was saying. Now, He knows they are hungry and He feels compassion for them. He does not want them to go away hungry. Q1 asks why Jesus was hesitant to send the crowd home. Because He was concerned that they might collapse. It says in v 3, "they will faint on the way."

READ Mark 8:4

"How are we supposed to find enough food to feed all these people out here in the middle of nowhere?" Q2, true or false? There is no way the disciples would know that Jesus could possibly feed a crowd of such an enormous size with the limited resources they had available. That is FALSE. They knew because they had seen it before. Don't the disciples remember what Jesus did before? Weren't they there when He fed the huge crowd of 5000 men back in Galilee? Yes. Timewise, that miracle was not that long ago. That was back in Mark Chapter 6 and we are only in Chapter 8 – somewhere between 6 months and a year ago. They should know what Jesus can do. They should!

The disciples appear to be slow in grasping who Jesus really is. It is like they recognize who Jesus is one day and then seem to forget who He is the next day. They have this case of spiritual "amnesia."

Once again, Jesus (like He did before) does not rebuke them. Instead (like before), He has them take inventory.

READ Mark 8:5-8

This event sounds pretty familiar, doesn't it? Jesus replicates the mass feeding miracle He had done before. He, once again, creates a large quantity of food out of very little. Only Jesus can do that.

READ Mark 8:9

Matthews says, "Those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children" (Matthew 15:38). So, once again, a larger crowd than just 4000. It could have been as much as 10,000.

The miracle here and the feeding of the 5000 men in Galilee are similar. What is different is the composition of the crowds. The crowd back in Galilee had been primarily Jewish and the crowd here in Decapolis is primarily Gentile. Now, there were probably Gentiles and Jews in both crowds, but primarily Gentile here. Neither crowd asks Jesus to feed them. In both cases, Jesus feeds them out of His compassion for them. Both crowds ate and were satisfied. They were full. Both crowds were recipients of God's grace.

Well, after they ate and were satisfied, Q3 asks what does Mark record was their response to Jesus? They gave no response at all – at least not that is recorded. There was nobody that came up and said, "Oh, thank you, Jesus!" Unlike the Jewish crowd, these Gentiles' view of Jesus is different. As Gentiles they would not have viewed Jesus as a Messiah King. They really do not know what to make of Jesus. He is a miracle worker and a good teacher. But they are not really sure what to think about Jesus.

So, Jesus and His disciples get into their boat and head back across the Sea of Galilee.

READ Mark 8:10

This location here is near (5 miles from) the modern city of Tiberias. If you know your geography, you will know that Tiberias is the largest city that is on the Sea of Galilee; the most populated today and probably back then as well. We know Dalmanutha today as the town of Magdala. Do you

all remember Mary Magdalene? She was from that town. After being gone for several months, Jesus receives quite a welcome.

READ Mark 8:11

"Welcome home, Jesus!" Right off the bat Jesus is confronted by some Jewish Pharisees. Matthew tells us in his account that the Sadducees are there also (Matthew 16:1). It says here that they are "testing" Jesus asking Him for a sign from heaven.

Now, before I go to v 12 and we see Jesus's response, I want to call a timeout and ask a question. Do these religious leaders really need a sign from heaven for Jesus to prove who He is? NO! We know this based on what one of their own (another Pharisee) had told Jesus earlier. Do you remember a guy named Nicodemus? He is described in the Gospel of John Chapter 3 as "a man of the Pharisees" and "a ruler of the Jews." This is what he says to Jesus in their famous meeting: "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with Him" (John 3:2). They do NOT need a sign. Jesus has been healing the sick, giving hearing to the deaf, curing lepers, feeding the multitudes, and even raising the dead! So clearly, they need no further proof that Jesus is from God. They know this based on what they have actually seen and heard.

READ Mark 8:12

You can just sense Jesus's frustration, His exasperation and His disappointment with the Jewish religious leaders. Q4, what sign does Jesus say will be given to this generation? No sign will be given. In Matthew's account Jesus says, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks a sign" (Matthew 12:39). Like Pharaoh in the book of Exodus, they have hardened their hearts. They have rejected the truth that God has revealed to them. And God HAS revealed truth to them. We know that from what Nicodemus said. In a spiritual sense these religious leaders are in total darkness. They have been given access to the light they need, but willfully choose to remain in the dark.

Jesus is finished talking to them and He quickly departs. This is an act of judgment because, as far as we know, at least based on the Gospel accounts, this is the last time that Jesus engages the Galilean Jewish leaders in conversation. He will obviously have some discussions with those leaders in Jerusalem. But here in Galilee, He is done. I think back to a statement God made in Genesis just before the Great Flood. He said, "My Spirit shall not strive and remain with man forever, because he is indeed flesh [sinful, corrupt]" (Genesis 6:3). So, Jesus is done talking to these people and moves on.

READ Mark 8:13

Jesus and His disciples head to the north end of the Sea of Galilee sailing toward the city of Bethsaida. In their hurry to leave they forget to bring something, which is what Q5 asks. What was it? Bread. Now, Jesus uses this as a teaching moment. While the disciples are thinking about food (typical guys), Jesus has their spiritual condition in mind.

READ Mark 8:14-16

In a physical sense, what does leaven do to bread? It makes it rise. The leavening agent (such as yeast or baking powder) creates gas bubbles within the dough, which causes it to rise when heated and then become lighter in texture. So, even a small amount of an artificially-introduced substance, like yeast, will profoundly change the flavor and the texture of the bread. So, Q6, what analogy does Jesus use to describe the negative influence of the Pharisees and Herod? The leaven in bread. Jesus uses a lot of analogies throughout the Bible, but here He uses this one – something that is common that they would understand.

In a broader sense Jesus has in mind the permeating influence of sin in the life of a person. Even a small amount of sin impacts us. Sin is pervasive. It produces a whole lot of really bad results in a person's life and adversely affects even the people around them. My sin does not just affect me!

But specifically, what does Jesus mean by “the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod”? What is He warning His disciples to avoid? Well, in Jesus’s day the Pharisees are the most influential religious leaders. Herod is the political ruler of the Jewish nation, albeit a puppet of the Romans. So, the leaven of the Pharisees speaks of the false doctrines being taught by the Pharisees. Remember, they rejected Jesus. They are misleading the people and beginning to turn them away from Jesus. The leaven of Herod is a reference not only to Herod’s immoral conduct (which we saw earlier in Mark in how he treated John the Baptist) but is also his twisted view of Jesus. Basically, Jesus warns His disciples to steer clear of those evil influences that are dominating their society.

Today it is not Pharisees and Herod that we have to worry about, is it? What would be the equivalent today that Jesus would warn us to avoid, these corrupting negative influences in our world, in our society?

[Our class input included the following things: the media, political party messaging, television, internet, addictions (like gambling and social media), false teachings, materialism, religion, movies, music, busy-ness, comfort].

Q7 asks, how do the disciples respond to Jesus’s teaching? They had previously marveled at His words, but not on this occasion. And, strangely enough, they do not ask Jesus to explain what He means by the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod. You would have thought that they would have asked Him for an explanation. But instead, these guys have a one-track mind. They are only thinking about food. Their concern in v 16 is that not having brought enough food.

Jesus has had enough and He rebukes the disciples for completely missing the point.

READ Mark 8:17-20

“What is with you people?”

Rather than listening to the spiritual truth that Jesus had just taught them, they are more concerned with more mundane things like eating bread. I want you to think about it. Here they are on this boat and they have one loaf of bread (v 14). There are 13 mouths to feed with that one loaf. Do the math. What happened before? Why are they concerned that they do not have enough bread to eat? Look what Jesus did for them. Do you think He could take one loaf and feed 13? I think so!

Jesus says, "Don't you guys remember what I did before? Are your hearts hardened? Do you not realize that I can supply all your needs?" That is what Jesus is telling them.

READ Mark 8:21

Q8 asks, how did Jesus rebuke His disciple? "Do you still not understand?" Matthew adds, and this is important: "then they understood." These hard-headed, hard-hearted disciples may have been in the dark spiritually about who Jesus is and what He taught, but slowly, there is this ray of light beginning to seep into their hearts and minds. Once spiritually blind, the disciples are gradually beginning to understand spiritual truths more clearly. The next story that we are going to read illustrates in a physical sense what the disciples are experiencing here spiritually. You will see what I mean.

READ Mark 8:22

A blind man is brought to Jesus. The miracle we are about to read is recorded only here in Mark's Gospel. Now, we do know that Jesus has healed other blind people before because in Luke Chapter 7, which takes place chronologically before this, it says, "He [Jesus] restored sight to many who were blind" (Luke 7:21). There is precedent for Him to heal blind people, so they bring this guy to Jesus.

READ Mark 8:23-24

While the man can see a little bit, things appear to be a bit blurry to him.

READ Mark 8:25

With a touch of Jesus's hands, the man can see clearly. Q9 asks, what is unique about this miracle that you do not find in any of Jesus's other miracles? This is the only miracle Jesus ever performed that was done gradually. Jesus had to make "an adjustment." In every other instance of Jesus's healings, it was instant and complete, no matter what it was.

This fits right in with what I said before about the disciples and their spiritual discernment – how it was gradual. They see a little bit, but it is still kind of unclear. And then later, "Oh yeah, now I see." So, in a spiritual sense that is what has happened with the disciples.

And that is the way it is with us as well in our walk with the Lord. We get it a little bit. We learn a little bit, especially when we were younger. We learn some things, but we do not learn everything. As we go through our spiritual journey, little by little through the things that we experience in our walk with God, OK now we see Him with a more mature view than we did, say, 10 years before. That is the way it should be. We gradually begin to learn more and more about Him. The more time we spend in prayer and in His word, the more we understand. The Holy Spirit gives us understanding. But that takes time. We do not just get all knowledge overnight. The more we study and learn and really devote ourselves, the faster we can learn. But it sometimes takes a little bit of life experience too, doesn't it?

READ Mark 8:26

We have seen this several times so far in our study. Jesus is trying to avoid distractions to His ministry and His message. The time has not yet arrived for Jesus to disclose His mysterious mission. I will talk more about that here in a little bit.

READ Mark 8:27-29

Q10 asks, who was it that spoke up and gave Jesus the right answer? It was Peter. We have a very familiar account here of Peter's confession. Peter, speaking on behalf of the other disciples declares unequivocally that

Jesus is the Christ. He is the Messiah. In Matthew's account Peter adds that Jesus is "the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). Peter gets it. So, we have to give Peter a little credit when he does give the right answer (because he doesn't always, but this time he does). I want you to notice something very important here after Peter makes his great confession. Jesus does not rebuke or correct Peter. In Matthew's account Jesus actually commends Peter for his statement. So then, we can safely conclude that Peter has just declared the truth about Jesus. Otherwise, Jesus would have corrected him, right? Peter's theology about Jesus is spot on. It is like the floodlights have finally been turned on!

READ Mark 8:30

They now know who Jesus is. It is no secret. Q11 asks, what charge does Jesus make to His disciples? He told them what? Not to tell anyone. OK, so the question has come up before and I knew it would come up again – why does Jesus say this? I have answered it before, but I found this in Nelson's Commentary which is really good. This is the quote: "The Jews expected the Messiah to be a political liberator. Jesus's first coming was meant to accomplish another kind of liberation – release from sin. Hence Jesus was careful not to use the name 'Messiah' publicly, for it was misunderstood by the Jewish people, the leaders, and the Roman authorities."

The place the disciples are at now spiritually paves the way for Jesus to reveal some important things about Himself to them. So, Jesus is like, "OK you've got that. Now I can reveal something more about Myself that maybe you were not ready for before." Now He is about to reveal some really hard truth to them in the next verses.

READ Mark 8:31-32a

"Son of Man" is a term from the book of Daniel. Jesus uses it here to describe Himself in the third person.

Q12 asks, what does Jesus reveal for the very first time to His disciples? That He will suffer many things, be rejected, be killed and rise

again. It must have shocked the disciples to hear this. "What?" For the very first time, Jesus reveals His mission and it probably was not what they expected. Again, good ole Peter speaks up on behalf of the disciples...

READ Mark 8:32b

In Matthew's account Peter says, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to You!" (Matthew 16:22).

READ Mark 8:33

In that moment, when Peter says that (I use my sanctified imagination here), Jesus flashes back to His temptation in the wilderness where Satan's voice had questioned Him and undermined His mission. That was fundamentally what was going on during those forty days. We just get a few snippets here and there. Jesus doesn't hear Peter in that moment. He hears Satan. That is why Jesus says what He says: "Get behind Me, Satan!"

I believe the greatest temptation Jesus faced while He was here in human form was the very real temptation to avoid the cross. Jesus knows the shame, the pain and suffering that He will experience. From a human standpoint, He is not exactly looking forward to going through all that. I like the way the writer of Hebrews put it, Hebrews 12:2: "Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." Jesus's joy was knowing what the end result would be by His death and resurrection. It was not the experience of the cross itself. Jesus knows what His mission is and that there is NO Plan B. He MUST die and then be raised back to life again. And the disciples heard that.

So, how did you answer Q13? This is one of those open-ended questions that you have to think about. What does Jesus mean by "not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man"?

[Class responses: Jesus has His thoughts on fulfilling His mission which required the cross; meanwhile Peter and the disciples viewed Jesus's death from a human perspective. They did not want to lose their friend. They did not want to see Jesus go through all that. They wanted Him to avoid the pain. Jesus was thinking about a heavenly kingdom while the disciples had in mind an earthly kingdom. The disciples could not grasp the idea of the Messiah going through all that pain].

From a human standpoint, Peter does not want to see Jesus suffer and die. We can certainly understand how he feels. But Jesus knows that He MUST die in order to accomplish His mission of redemption. He knows that.

READ Mark 8:34-35

Jesus had just been talking about the cross as He turns to the crowd.

Many of the people listening to Jesus had witnessed Roman executions. They certainly knew about them. They had been told about them. The condemned prisoners were forced to carry their own crosses to the place of execution. So, Jesus's message is clear. "If you choose to follow Me, you will have to die to yourself." In Luke 14 Jesus says, "Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be My disciples" (Luke 14:27). In other words, you must renounce the right to run your own life. This is a hard teaching. It runs completely counter to our own culture where it is all about us, our happiness, and our rights.

READ Mark 8:36-37

Something to think about. Your eternal destiny is the most important priority of your life, or it should be! Not this world, but the world to come. That is what you should invest in. What you have in this life pales in comparison to what you are going to have for eternity. I mentioned earlier about Jesus being tempted by Satan in the wilderness. Jesus had the opportunity to gain the world by worshipping Satan. But He found victory in being obedient to His Father instead.

READ Mark 8:38

By the way, what applied to that generation applies to our generation too. I don't think any of us will argue with that, right? It is still an adulterous and sinful generation.

Matthew 5:16, the Sermon on the Mount; Jesus makes this statement, which goes right along with what He just told the crowd: "Let your light so shine before men" – that light that you have that He has given you – "that they may see your good works" – they are going to see Jesus in you – "and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

We need to share the light with the world that is out there (that is in darkness) that we have been given. They are in total darkness spiritually. We do that one-on-one with those we come in contact with that do not know Christ. Let them see Jesus in you. If they live in darkness, they will be attracted to your light.