

Mark 8:1-26

Date: Sunday, 23 May 2021

Scripture: Mark 8:1-26

Sermon: Paying Close Attention to Jesus

Preacher: Justin Ang

Passage

Mark 8:1 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.

Mark 8:11 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.

Mark 8:14 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 8:22 And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. 23 And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, "Do you see anything?" 24 And he looked up and said, "I see people, but they look like trees, walking." 25 Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. 26 And he sent him to his home, saying, "Do not even enter the village."

Transcript

Are You Paying Attention?

One of the television shows that I watch during the week, if I ever get a chance, is to watch "Have You Been Paying Attention?" It's an Australian show where they get guests who are often comedians and the host asks them questions about the week's news. They might show a picture of a person who was featured in the news, and they need to interpret it, giving their own spin on it.

It's a question that we might have heard in class. "Are you paying attention?!" Another way that I've heard it said is, "How many times have I said to you!?" Here in this encounter with Jesus and the Pharisees, it feels a little like that. Actually, it's not just the Pharisees but it's also the disciples, as we've walked with them, it feels like they keep missing the point. And Jesus has to say, "are you paying attention?" It's a

message that's relevant to us today, "Are we, Caringbah Presbyterian, paying attention?" Are you and I paying close attention to Jesus?

Today's passage, it's an encouragement to us to hold onto Jesus. To cling to Jesus with our lives. And I want to draw out three things today which you'll see come from the passage.

1. Be careful to listen to His voice
2. Beware of false teaching
3. Bread of heaven

Be Careful to Listen to His Voice

Let's talk about the first point, be careful to listen to his voice. This passage here we see that the Pharisees are increasingly antagonistic of Jesus. They ask for a sign, here at verse 11, they ask for a sign.

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. Mark 8:11-13 (ESV)

As we walk with Jesus on his way to Jerusalem, the Pharisees continue to argue with Jesus. When we see them asking for a sign, it's really aggressive. It's not because they seriously want to seek a sign from him. It's kind of how sometimes, I'll ask Rachel about something that I'm worried about. And I'll tell her, "Tell me not to worry" and she'll then proceed to tell me not to worry. But what do you think I'll do next? I'll worry... And then she'll say, "Didn't I tell you not to worry!?" You can see that Jesus is exasperated here. He's fed up with the Pharisees.

Maybe we know someone like that in our lives. I once had a friend with whom I shared the gospel with. He had grown up in a Christian home, but decided that he would walk away from the faith. And for a number of years, I tried to convince him. I showed him all the evidence. The number of manuscripts that the Scriptures have, the fact that Jesus lived and walked on earth. And yet, he kept asking me for more certainty. I realised that it was pointless, because he had already made up his mind. He refused to hear the voice of Jesus. Maybe you know someone who is like that.

But before we're quick to condemn other people for doing that, we should also look to ourselves. Because if we're really honest with ourselves, we realise that we can be like that too! Yes, we know Jesus. But there are some things that we don't take Jesus at his word. We are slow to listen to his voice. When he says to us, "Don't look lustfully at other people" we don't take him seriously. Or maybe when he says that we are to turn the other cheek, we don't take him seriously. Or maybe when he says that we are to give our money away so that the kingdom of God can be blessed, we don't take him seriously. Or maybe when he says that we are to take up our cross and follow him into death, we don't take him seriously. What has Jesus said to you that you don't take him seriously?

Let me lay down two challenges for you this week.

Firstly, what is one thing that you can learn to be obedient to Jesus in this week? One thing that you've struggled to obey him in, that you can be obedient to Him and his voice. So that you can be careful in not just hearing his voice, but also obeying it. Elizabeth Elliot writes, that worry and trust are mutually exclusive. Worry is the antithesis of trust. When you're worrying you're not trusting God. But when you trust God, then there's no room for worry. Trust and obey, for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

But secondly, what signs has Jesus shown to you in your life? The Pharisees keep asking for signs but they refuse to believe it. Even when Jesus performs miracles like the feeding of the five thousand men and the four thousand, they're meant to show Jesus' power, his majesty, his glory. I'm sure, that Jesus has shown you his personal power. So here's the challenge, think about all the miracles that Jesus has shown you in your life, write them down. I heard a friend share about how, as he reflected on his childhood, he could see Jesus' mercy and kindness. He told me how he had nearly been killed when the brakes on his pushbike came off and he resulted in him being thrown off his bike. And landing on the road, in front of an oncoming truck. The driver braked. And our friend's head was just touching the wheel. That's how close he got to dying. The fact that he was saved is a sign of Jesus' care.

We are to be careful not to harden our hearts like the Pharisees. The writer to the Hebrews warns that we are not to harden our hearts. In fact, the writer says that we are to exhort one another as a way to help us to not harden our hearts. So when you reflect on the miracles, why don't you share how Jesus has been kind to you, with one another. Down at morning tea, when you're talking about how crazy my hair gets, why don't you ask, "How has Jesus been good to you?"

May we be careful to listen to his voice. That's the first point.

Beware of False Teaching

But the second point that we are looking at is the need to beware of false teaching. Let me show you.

Now they had forgotten to bring bread, and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. 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?" Mark 8:14-18 (ESV)

Jesus warns his disciples about the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod. Leaven is another word for yeast. Because a little leaven affects bread. If you have yeast in bread, it will rise. If you don't have yeast, then it is flat bread. But the point that Jesus is making is that even a tiny amount of yeast will affect bread. And Jesus is basically warning them of false teaching.

A little mistake can make a big difference.

If you're a little off-course then it can make a big difference in your life. Imagine you were flying from Los Angeles to New York. You took off from LAX and the pilot made an error. Instead of punching in the coordinates of New York, the pilot made an error of 3.5 degrees south. Do you know where you would land? Washington DC. 350 kilometres approximately. A distance greater than Sydney to Canberra. A slight change in following Christ, if we follow false teaching can make a big difference.

So Jesus warns about the yeast, the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod. What's the mistake that they're making? It's the fact that they think their religious activity can be a substitute for a real relationship with Jesus. About a decade ago, a friend of mine showed me his impressive smartphone. He told me it was an iPhone. I thought wow that has got to be impressive. Except when he brought it out, I had to laugh because it was fake. It wasn't even the right size. The screen was all wrong. I think it even said, iPone. I thought, 'Seriously? You think that's an iPhone?' That's

what the Pharisees were doing, they had a counterfeit, fake religion. It wasn't an authentic relationship. Sure, it might have looked good, since they were clean, clean pots, cups and saucers. But when you got deep down, the Pharisees missed the point. They missed out on a real relationship with Jesus.

But are we like that? Where we think that a little religion is enough? A teaspoon of church service, a table spoon of prayer meeting and an ounce of bible study, can help us? Are we concerned about appearances and the way that people see us, like the Pharisees, when God wants us to be more concerned about the weightier matters. When God is reaching out to us for a true and living relationship?

Are we concerned with the heart? Or are we concerned with appearances? That's the question we need to ask. Are we so concerned with activity and appearances that we've forgotten the heart which is loving Jesus, spending time with Him, learning to obey him?

Let me ask, do you pay close attention to Jesus and what he says to you? I pray that every time I enter the pulpit, I say things that are true of the Scriptures. But I'm not perfect, nobody is, and so we need to keep testing what I say according to the Scriptures. I recently heard that you can tune pianos with tuning forks. But imagine, if you decided that you would tune a piano with another piano. And that piano with another piano. It'd be a little bit like Chinese whispers. The message would be lost after it was passed on through various people. We need to make sure that we are getting our message from the source, the Scriptures. And it's why I try as much as possible to refer you to the passage we are looking at each week.

Jesus says that his sheep know his voice. And they follow him. Do we hear and follow? A friend of mine decided that he wanted to teach his children a lesson. Don't worry, it was a good lesson. He decided that he would buy a lamb, and he had three kids. One of his sons would spend time feeding the lamb with him. Do you know what would happen when his son called the lamb's name? The lamb would come. Unfortunately, the other sons had no interest in feeding the lamb. You can guess what happened when these other sons called the lamb's name. Nothing! Let's learn to hear his voice and to follow him.

Hearing his voice.

Being careful of false teaching.

Bread of Heaven

Let's talk about the last point as we conclude.

Today, I've been trying to encourage us with this passage because it's encouraging us to pay close attention to His voice. To take him at his word, to believe him, to see that he is faithful in his promises and his love for us. To remember the signs he has made to us. And to follow Him.

But I reflect on listening to other people, and I realise that it's sometimes hard. My parents, used to nag me a lot, I wasn't a good listener. They'd say, clean your room, and I'd get around to it, maybe a week later. They would have to say it often to me and they would often get so frustrated. It's kind of what Jesus goes through with the Pharisees, to the point that we're told that he gives out a sigh. A sigh of exasperation.

When I think of why I didn't listen to my parents, I realise it was my foolishness, thinking that they didn't love me. Thinking that they didn't care for me. But it truly wasn't the case.

Is it the case for Jesus? Why can we learn to listen to Jesus' voice and follow Him? The answer is because Jesus shows us that he is our provider. Jesus shows that he is our carer. Jesus shows us that he is the bread of heaven.

Jesus was not only able to provide for the 5,000 Jewish men and their families. But he's also able to provide for the 4,000 Gentiles that we saw in this passage. Jesus is the one who provided sight to the blind man at the end of this passage. Jesus shows that he is able to provide for each one of our needs. But not only that. He shows us that he is one who has a deep love for each one of us. We're told that he has a compassion. A deep love and compassion for you and me.

Recently, Rachel and I were at a family dinner. We asked them, what would you like us to bring? And they said, yourselves, but if you must, just bring a drink. When we arrived, we realised that everything was provided for. All the food, entrees, mains and dessert were all provided for. There were also drinks. Sometimes, we forget that we really don't provide anything to God, he's given us everything. But we can forget that.

The reason why we can listen to Jesus' voice and follow him is because he's the one who has shown himself to be the one we can rely on. The one who will provide

for us. Let me ask this, who do we look to to provide for us? Maybe we're like the disciples and we've missed the point. And we need to remind ourselves that when Jesus went to the cross, he provided for our greatest need. The forgiveness of our sins. If he is for us, who then can be against us? What then can separate us from the love of Christ? If the Father did not spare us his own son, how will he not give us all things? If Christ died for us, if he showed us that he is the bread of heaven, how can we not listen to his voice now and follow him? May we always pay close attention to His voice.

Let's pray.