*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

February 15 - 20

Mark’s Gospel

**Monday, February 15 Mark 8:1-10**

*“Jesus feeds 4,000”*

The similarities between the first (6:30-44) and the second feeding of the multitudes are obvious. Thousands of hungry people who come to hear Jesus are fed in a desert setting where food is scarce. In each instance, human hunger pulls at the heart of Jesus so that he invokes a miracle to feed them all with a few loaves and fishes and still has plenty of food left over. The repetition allows a different response by the disciples to the crowds’ hunger, inviting us, along with them, to a higher level of spiritual insight.

Jesus initiates the action by calling his disciples to him and stating the problem. No longer do they urge, “Send them away.” Instead, they ask the question, “How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?” There is a world of difference between this question and the one that they asked at the first feeding. Earlier, they wanted to know, “Why should we feed them?” Now, with faith in Jesus, they ask, “How can we feed them?” “Why?” is the query of a skeptic; “How?” is the question of a person who wants to believe.

*Show me how, Lord, to live in obedience to your will for me. Amen.*

**Tuesday, February 16 Mark 8:11-13**

*“Why do these people seek after a sign?”*

After he feeds the 4,000, the Pharisees once again engage Jesus. Whenever Jesus performs a miracle that captures the imagination of the masses, a Pharisaical “truth squad” tries to cast doubt in the minds of the people by some kind of counterchallenge. In this case, they ask for a sign from heaven, meaning a miraculous sign of God’s pleasure or displeasure. The manna in the wilderness is an example of the former while the destruction of Sodom by fire is an example of the later.

Jesus has no more time to waste in futile debate with the Pharisees. Speaking volumes in a groan of disgust, he cuts short the conversation by verbally refusing to give a sign and physically walking away. As painful as it is, there comes a time when debate over spiritual issues must be cut off. If the integrity of Jesus’ life, the truth of his words, and the hope of his acts do not convince the Pharisees that he is the Christ, nothing else will. The blind cannot see the truth no matter how many signs are given.

*By faith I have been saved, Lord, not by witnessing miraculous signs. Amen.*

**Wednesday, February 17 Mark 8:14-21**

*“Don’t you understand yet?”*

As with the Pharisees in the earlier exchange with Jesus (verses 11-13), the disciples have also failed to discern the signs Jesus has shown them. In the first boat scene, Jesus calmed the sea and rebuked them for their lack of faith. In the second boat scene, they are again terrified, this time when Jesus comes to them walking on the waves. Now in this third boat scene, Jesus rebukes them for their quarrel over not having any bread and accuses them of having hardened hearts, blind eyes, and dull hearing.

The feedings of the multitudes and the sea adventures have given the disciples a unique opportunity to learn who Jesus is, to understand the nature and source of the power that comes through him, and to put their faith in him, but they remain bamboozled by it all. Their worry about where their next meal is coming from keeps them from looking up and seeing what Jesus has done in their midst. Jesus has fed nine thousand people with next to nothing, and they’re worried about having enough to fix lunch for thirteen?!

*No matter what my need is, Lord, you are able to meet it. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

February 15 - 20

Mark’s Gospel

**Thursday, February 18 Mark 8:22-26**

*“A stubborn blindness”*

Mark’s next scene records the healing of a blind man. At first, the blind man receives rudimentary sight but things are out of focus. Jesus again lays his hands on the man’s eyes and the healing is complete. Since the man does not recover his sight immediately, we get the impression that his blindness is stubborn and hard to cure. The context within which Mark places this healing gives this unusual two-stage healing added significance.

The blind man’s healing occurs between two examples of the disciples’ blindness (8:14-21; 8:31-33). This physical healing of blindness serves as a paradigm for the spiritual healing of the disciples’ sight, which also comes gradually and with difficulty. Jesus will ask the disciples, “Who do you say I am?” Peter does see something: “You are the Christ” (8:29). The first stage of healing is complete. But he only has partial sight, as Jesus’ stern rebuke in 8:33 makes clear. Peter sees, but he sees with blurred vision. Peter and the disciples require a second touch before they will see all things clearly – that the Messiah must suffer and die.

*Where there is still blindness in me toward you, Lord, heal me completely. Amen.*

**Friday, February 19 Mark 8:27-33**

*“Seeing things from God’s point of view”*

Jesus takes his disciples to Caesarea Philippi, a town famed for its grand marble temple built by Herod the Great in honor of the Roman emperor. Peter’s recognition that Jesus is the Christ occurs in a pagan outpost – as far from Jerusalem as one can get and still be in Israel. Jesus will push from here to Jerusalem, the Holy City, where they will mock him as the Christ as he suffers on a cross.

After Peter’s statement of faith, Jesus explains his mission to his disciples not to predict future events but to verify for his disciples that what is about to happen fulfills God’s plan. The disciples can understand it only after the fact because this plan runs counter to everything they were conditioned to expect about the Messiah. Peter displays astonishing nerve by trying to set Jesus straight on what is and what is not necessary. He calls Jesus aside and rebukes him for being so mistaken as to think that the Messiah will ever have to suffer. Like the blind man from Bethsaida, the scales have partially, and only partially, fallen from his eyes.

*Open my eyes, Lord, that I may see all things from your point of view. Amen.*

**Saturday, February 20 Mark 8:34 – 9:1**

*“What Jesus expects of his disciple”*

When Jesus lays out the expectations of discipleship, he presents them with three demands (8:34), a rationale for accepting these demands (8:35-37), a solemn warning (8:38), and a confident promise (9:1). The first demand is self-denial, to learn to say, “Not my will but thine be done.” The second demand is to take up one’s cross, to be willing to accept danger and sacrifice on his behalf. The third demand is to follow the way *he* has chosen, not the way they would choose for themselves, by following his example.

Jesus appeals to the basic human desire to secure one’s life as the rationale for following Jesus’ demands. If we give up our life for his sake and the gospel, we will be given the only life that counts. Jesus next warns his disciples about the judgment, warning them not to retreat because of his shame in the eyes of the world. Jesus concludes with the solemn promise that their suffering will not go on forever. His resurrection and his coming in glory with the holy angels removes the sting from the humiliation of the cross.

*To be your disciple is not easy, Lord, but it is eternally worthwhile. Amen.*