

Why does this Generation Seek a Sign?  
Mark 8

Deuteronomy 13

Hebrews 12

Congregation Jeremiah 23: 1-6

Well it would seem that today is another day of full chapter readings. It can be difficult when picking the reading to find a spot to jump in at, or to end at to convey the message that coincides with our passage we are looking at. For each verse builds upon the next, and each other leading to a final statement at the end. So, that means, we read entire chapters in our morning bible reading.

I apologize if you have grown accustomed to the lengthier sermons the past few weeks thinking that this is a trend that might continue. But on the other hand, if you thought I was to long winded then you will be happy to know today is going to be back to normal! This passage that we are looking at today was a bit of a struggle to expound upon for at least half of it was something that we had just gone through in the previous chapter. And the last half ends with a charge, or warning from Jesus which will be our main focus this morning.

Last week we finished chapter 7 in which Mark records Jesus' journey into the Gentile lands to which he encounters large multitudes of people who gather and bring their sick for him to heal not much different then his ministry around the sea of Galilee in all of the previous chapters. And here in these first few verses, we actually see a repeated miracle. Jesus once again feeds the multitudes with no more then a few loaves of bread a a few small fish. (read 8:1-9)

Also we see just like in the previous account Mark here makes a note of Jesus' compassion upon the people. Seeing their need and providing for them. Also I find the disciples response rather interesting, and frankly disappointing. It wasn't to long ago that Jesus fed the 5000 men who had gathered with a small basket of bread and fish and it seems that the disciples still do not fully understand this man Jesus that they are following. At this point they have seen him heal countless people, cast out demons, calm storms, walk on water and even raise a girl from the dead and yet they still cast doubt.

When I first read this I thought to myself, sheesh man who dull can you be? Jesus did this before don't you think he will do it again? But we to are much the same are we not? How quickly we forget Gods provision for us, or how he has seen us through trials We always seem to be fixated on what is happening now, and how can we possibly get through this, forgetting what God has already done for us. Much like this disciple here, we look at what lies ahead and we are discouraged, overwhelmed. And honestly what it comes down to is a lack of faith. At one level we know God will provide, and that he always does but it isn't until it happens that we look back and go, "ah yea... now I see how God was working that all out." I think it is important to keep a hold of these moments, to recount them, to meditate upon God's goodness, and his gracious provision so that when we do come to these impassible mountains in our life instead of worrying, or being discouraged and overwhelmed we turn to God, remembering his grace in previous times, his provision, and his deliverance and we wait upon him.

It would seem that Jesus is teaching is disciples this same lesson again since apparently they did not get it the first time. And as we see here as well, God provides more then enough. It is the same for us, I think of Paul when he asks God to remove the thorn in his flesh and God's answer is "my grace is sufficient for you."

Now that may not be the answer that Paul was seeking, and it may not be the answer we want to receive when we are struggling but that does not negate that it is true. I am going to probably sound a little TV preacher here, but it is true that God's grace is sufficient, he provides the grace that we need to persevere. And that grace is definitely abundant, it doesn't run out, it doesn't end. We are his children, and he promises that he will provide for us. Every time I say that I always feel like I need to add a disclaimer. God's provision for us is not this idea that we will be healthy, wealthy, and wise, but rather it is a provision of grace to get us through this life.

It is patience, love, peace. Have you ever felt the peace of God? Have you ever gone to God in prayer over something that is nagging you, only to feel a peace come over you? The problem didn't go away, but in that moment the focus has changed from what I think I need, to God your will be done and in you I will rest no matter the outcome for you are a gracious, loving Father. Jim taught on this very thing when we were visiting them in MO. He was preaching out of Hebrews and being careful that no root of bitterness spring out of you. His conclusion was that this root of bitterness at its core is unbelief.

It is not believing God in his promises that he will provide, that he will take care of us, and that all things work together for good for those who are called according to his purpose. We need to identify those roots of bitterness in us and not let them fester and grow. Once again that is why it is so important to have our hearts and minds focused on God, to be in prayer, to read his word so we can identify and uproot these areas, and these moments of unbelief.

Now, speaking of unbelief, starting in verse 10 we see the Pharisees have once again arrived on the scene. After Jesus feeding the 4000, he and his disciples once again get back into a boat and it says that they came to the region of Dalmanutha. This is the only mention of this place in the new testament, so its exact location is unknown to us today. But it is likely believed that it was an area close by Gennesaret where Jesus had previously fed the 5000. So starting in verse 10-21 which is what we are going to be focusing our time on today.

So once again the Pharisees are trying to cause trouble, they are not merely politely asking for another miracle here, but rather they are putting forth a challenge, they want to test him, they are seeking to trap him, to discredit him. This request for a sign, is not the same as a miracle like what Jesus had previously been performing. This request is more in line of asking to receive a sign like the prophets of Old would receive from God. They were invoking the test put forth in Deuteronomy 13 that we read this morning. They did not really want to witness a sign, they were seeking to show that he was a false teacher and false prophet. They reasoned that if Jesus truly was doing God's work, then God should bestow a miraculous sign, giving outward proof of Jesus' authority that he claimed. But as we see Jesus has no reason to prove himself to them, he has already done so many times not in the miracles that he performed but in his teaching, pointing out that the scriptures point to him, as we see in Luke's record of Jesus teaching the synagogue in Nazareth. Let us go to Luke, chapter 4 and read that account starting in verse 16. This is the account that we saw here in Mark when Jesus went back home to Nazareth, and was rejected by those who knew him. (read Luke 4:16-23)

They had already been given signs, they had the prophets and the law and the promises given to Abraham, all of these things which pointed to Jesus now. And in reading Isaiah, Jesus said that it is now fulfilled in him. But they were dull, and blind and did not believe that he was the promised messiah, but rather he was an impostor, a blasphemer. We still see this same lack of faith today, skeptics today put forth tests, and challenges to God with his action hinging on their belief. "God if you would do this for me, or take away this problem, then I will believe."

But that is not how it works, God does not need to prove himself to us, he is God, we are his creation. Whether we want to admit it or not, we are his subordinates who answer to him either in faith, or in judgement. God does not answer to us, he does not need to prove himself to us. And if he did, would we truly believe? Take these pharisee's and scribes for example, all of the miracles, the teaching, the ministry that he had and all it did was to further their bitterness and anger toward him.

As we said last week closing out chapter 7, faith comes by hearing, and it is God who heals our ears making us able to hear. We, as in mankind exists for his good pleasure and will, not the other way around. And that is one of the major problems with the idea that we can coerce, or convince God in any way. How many times have you seen it go across your facebook page, or heard it from the health and wealth tv preachers, like and share this, or comment amen and share this 5 times and God will bless you. Wrong! God is not bound by us, we are bound to him, his will shall be done not ours. We can not force his hand through our actions, it is not as though we become annoying enough that he finally gives in and gives us what we want like a parent who is worn down by his children's whining.

This is God, the sovereign creator of all things, What we should be doing is seeking his will, humbly as the created being that we are, not trying to assert our own desire, and demand that he bow to it because he now owes us because we typed amen. This concept of this type of quote unquote faithfulness, is unbiblical, it is not supported by scripture one bit, but rather it is a fabrication of false teachers who are appealing to our own self worth, our own pride and arrogance. All things which we know God hates, so why do we think that this will garnish results? If we approach God in our own pride, believing if we do something that he will owe us what we ask, when everything in scripture teaches that it is we who owe God everything. Why does this generation seek a sign? This is not faith, but rather it is a rebellion against God. The Bible says, Hear and believe, have faith, and follow. Demanding a sign, attempting to gain any merit or reward through our actions, is not having faith, it is not following in the footsteps of our savior.

Just look at Jesus reaction in verse 12, "But he sighed deeply in his spirit." Their unbelief was troubling, and depressing, and he was not about to bow to their desires for so called proof of his authority, or of his claim of being sent from God. As James Edwards puts it, "In the Synoptic Gospels the demand for signs is itself a sign of attempting to gain by empirical means what can only be gained by faith and trust. It is the false prophet who seeks to deceive by signs and wonders. Jesus forsakes signs, for to force the evidence upon one would make a faith response by its very nature impossible. Faith that depends on proof is not really faith, but rather only veiled doubt. For example, If a man were to hire a private detective to spy on his wife in order to prove her faithfulness, the detectives proofs would scarcely guarantee the husband's faith. Faith, like love itself, cannot be proven; it can only be demonstrated by trust and active commitment.

In the next following verses that finish out this passage we are looking at today we find Jesus warning his disciples to be aware of the leaven of the pharisees and of Herod. As we know leaven is often used as a negative example of sin, of things that spring up and grow in our hearts and minds that can spread like a cancer. In the context of this passage and what has been taking place it would appear that Jesus is warning them to not be caught up in the unbelief of the pharisee's and Herod. Do not let their antagonizing arguments become like leaven in your heart growing into doubt and leading to unbelief. And as we can see by the Disciples response, they are not even aware of their own condition. They misunderstand yet again and think that he is talking about them not having any bread. But as we see Jesus goes on to remind them of the feeding of the multitudes to point to them that this is not about food, but something else.

The leaven of doubt is a dangerous thing, and is something that not only effects unbelievers such as the pharisee's, but believers too are in danger of being affected by it. It is much like the teaching in Hebrews to not allow a root of bitterness to spring up. There are many things that can cause this doubt to grow in us, to have moments where we are lacking the faith that we should have, and if we are not careful and allow ourselves to continue in these doubts, or dabble in false doctrines and beliefs and in the end it may prove out that we never truly had faith to begin with, but rather our faith was like that of these pharisee's, looking for a sign.

Again, that is why it is important to be diligent in prayer, and in being in God's word. It is only through understanding, and recognition of these roots of bitterness, and bits of yeast in our hearts that we can guard against them. That is the danger of false teachers, and false doctrines. They can sound good, or be so close to the truth that they lead one away.

It can be easy to fall into their trap as they appeal to your faith, or even to your lack of faith. All of us desire to grow in faith, to grow in grace, to mature as Christians, so it can be tempting to follow someone who is telling you that they have the secret to unlocking your faith, the secret to spiritual growth. Then they proceed to twist scripture out of context to pad their arguments, to justify their statements. We ought not to get caught up in this, but instead follow Jesus' charge here in verse 15, take heed, and beware of the leaven of these unbelievers. Do not be caught up in their unbelief, do not be deceived by them, for they are like hunters who lay traps to see who they can catch into their schemes. These are those we find in Jeremiah chapter 23:16-22

“Thus says the Lord of Hosts, Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They make you worthless, they speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the Lord. They continually say to those who despise me, the Lord has said, you shall have peace. And everyone who walks according to the dictates of his own heart, they say, NO evil shall come upon you. For who has stood in the counsel of the Lord, and has perceived and heard his word? Who has marked his word and heard it? Behold, a whirlwind of the Lord has gone forth in fury and violent whirlwind it will fall violently on the head of the wicked. The anger of the lord will not turn back, until he has executed and performed the thoughts of his heart. In the latter days you will understand it perfectly. I have not sent these prophets yet they ran, I have not spoken to them yet they prophesied But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they would have turned from their evil way and from the evil of their doings.

We who have the spirit should be wiser than that, for the spirit grants us discernment and ministers to us, teaching us what is right and what is wrong. If we truly have had our ears opened, and we are able to hear and understand God's word. If we truly have the spirit ministering in us then we should be able to discern such things. It is not as though we are immune to such things, if we were I don't think Jesus would have charged the disciples with guarding themselves against unbelief. We are in danger of falling away, or being lead astray but the true test becomes how we react over time. Do we repent and return, or do we continue in our unbelief, or following false teachers and false doctrine? That is why when I have seen a friend of mine seemingly go off the deep end, theologically, and spiritually speaking I did not hound him, brow beating him constantly confronting him of his error, but rather with patience and love waited upon the holy spirit to work conviction in his heart trusting in God, and praying that understanding would return to him. And it didn't take a long, and upon his return and reporting of that time of spiritual darkness it is quite apparent that God was there letting him have a taste of the despair that, that belief lead to.

And in the end, this test of faith that he endured once again proved out, that God is just, and he is gracious. Letting him suffer justly, but graciously drawing him back through that suffering. To me this stands as an example of a person of faith who has been led astray for various reasons, and for a time God may allow you to follow that path if for anything else to show you the darkness of those lies, and the decent and emptiness of a false belief. But in the end, he has promised that not one of his children will be lost. Again, that is why it is so important to understand God's word, to study, to listen, to pray. So that we can be on guard against such things, not to be lead into false teachings, not allowing ourselves to doubt God's promises, or his word. Not to be consumed by fear, or harboring roots of bitterness and unbelief. We should repent and turn from such things, having our focus and understanding be turned upon Christ our savior and not to be lead astray but rather stand fast in our faith rooted in the word of God alone.