

This morning, we are in the ninth week of a sermon series I am calling “Savior and Lord,” looking at what it means to relate to Jesus as both Savior – the one who died for our sins to give us eternal life – and Lord – the one who we follow and emulate. We are working our way through Mark’s gospel in this series. Mark was Peter’s traveling companion, and the Gospel of Mark is mainly Peter’s eyewitness testimony of Jesus (Peter was first known as Simon before Jesus changed his name). This morning we’ll be in Mark 7 & 8. Last week Jesus was in a dispute with the religious leaders and told them that from God’s perspective, being clean, pure, or right with God is not a matter of external rituals, but is about the heart. Interestingly, he is going to follow up on that by spending the next part of his ministry in Gentile territory, where everything was considered unclean by the Jews. Let’s read 7:24-8:21 and see what Jesus has to say:

***Mark 7:24 - 8:21** - Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. ²⁵ In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an evil spirit came and fell at his feet. ²⁶ The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷ "First let the children eat all they want," he told her, "for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs." ²⁸ "Yes, Lord," she replied, "but even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." ²⁹ Then he told her, "For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter." ³⁰ She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone. ³¹ Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. ³² There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man. ³³ After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. ³⁴ He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means, "Be opened!"). ³⁵ At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly. ³⁶ Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. ³⁷ People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak." ^{NIV} **Mark 8:1** During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, ² "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. ³ If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance." ⁴ His disciples answered, "But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?" ⁵ "How many loaves do you have?" Jesus asked. "Seven," they replied. ⁶ He told the*

crowd to sit down on the ground. When he had taken the seven loaves and given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people, and they did so. ⁷ They had a few small fish as well; he gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them. ⁸ The people ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ⁹ About four thousand men were present. And having sent them away, ¹⁰ he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha. The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven. ¹² He sighed deeply and said, "Why does this generation ask for a miraculous sign? I tell you the truth, no sign will be given to it." ¹³ Then he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side. ¹⁴ The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat. ¹⁵ "Be careful," Jesus warned them. "Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod." ¹⁶ They discussed this with one another and said, "It is because we have no bread." ¹⁷ Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? ¹⁸ Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember? ¹⁹ When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" "Twelve," they replied. ²⁰ "And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" They answered, "Seven." ²¹ He said to them, "Do you still not understand?"

From a birds-eye view, this section that we are reading today is very similar to what we have already seen – Jesus casts out a demon, heals someone, and feeds a large crowd of people. We've seen all of this before. But there is one big difference: he does this among the Gentiles, the non-Jewish people. That in itself is significant, as Jesus is showing that whatever He has come to do, it is not just for the Jews only, but also for the Gentiles. I want to organize this sermon by beginning at the end, with Jesus' brief interaction with the Pharisees and his words with his disciples, and then use that to get into the details of the earlier encounters.

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Yeast in the old days was known as leaven. It was produced by keeping back a piece of the previous week's dough, storing it in suitable conditions, and adding juices to promote the process of fermentation. But it could easily become tainted and spread poison, infecting the next batch. Jesus is telling them to watch out for the teaching and attitudes of the Pharisees and of Herod, for it can be poisonous. Looking at this passage and the previous passages in Mark, what is the "yeast of the Pharisees," those teachings and attitudes that can poison your faith and life?

1) The Pharisees refused to consider the evidence and believe that Jesus was Messiah and Lord

The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven.

How many signs do they need? What has Jesus already done? Healed people, cast out demons, forgiven, preached with authority, stilled storms, raised the dead. What other signs do you need?

Earlier in this chapter, he has gone to Decapolis and was brought a deaf-mute. Look at what Jesus does:

³³ *After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. ³⁴ He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means, "Be opened!"). ³⁵ At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.*

He takes him aside so as to not make a spectacle of him. The deaf man would have been used to the stigma, the gawking, people thinking he was dumb. Jesus uses sign language to communicate with him. He looks up to heaven – this power is from God. He sighs, a sign of compassion and caring. He touches him. And he heals him. And even though he tells the people not to tell anyone, they talk about it, and they say: *"He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."*

This is a quote from a Messianic passage in Isaiah 35. They recognized that this is not just a healing. This is the promised intervention of God!

Isaiah 35:3-6 - *Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; ⁴ say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you."* ⁵ *Then*

will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. ⁶ Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.

He is the Messiah. He has come to save us.

How many signs do you need? But they refused to believe, and wanted Jesus to produce another sign for them. And Jesus refused.

Now, I want to acknowledge that it must have been hard to believe. After all, they believed that God was one. They believed there would be a Messiah, but they certainly didn't expect it to be like Jesus. But still, they were not open to the evidence that was staring them right in the face.

There are some people who don't believe but are open to Jesus.

***Matthew 7:7-8** - "Ask and it will be given to you; **seek** and you will **find**; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened*

There are others who don't believe and are not open to Him. Some have doubts but want answers. Others just have doubts to doubt but don't really want the answers. They want Jesus to give them a sign. Give me a burning bush. Think of **Bill Maher** who said, "I won't believe unless Jesus descends from the sky during the Super Bowl Halftime show and turns the nachos into bread and fish." Watch out for unbelief.

There are some people who refuse to believe the evidence. They reject the resurrection, the person of Jesus. They are not moved by the way He has transformed this world. And they may say that they would believe if Jesus gave them a sign, but Jesus won't give a sign to those who are not truly interested in believing in Him. Regarding them, Jesus says:

***Matthew 7:6** - "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your **pearls** to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.*

The Pharisees refused to believe despite the evidence. Don't be like them. Believe on the basis of the evidence. And do not waste time with those who are not really interested in believing.

2) The Pharisees thought it was obedience to external rules and rituals that made you right with God, not faith

As we saw last week, the Pharisees added laws to the OT laws and saw obedience to those laws as the sign of righteousness. And so there were insiders and outsiders. Jesus challenged them, telling them that God was not concerned about external ritual if the internal faith was not connected to it. Listen to how harshly Jesus put this in Matthew:

Matthew 23:25-28 - "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. ²⁶ Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. ²⁷ "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. ²⁸ In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

And then to follow up on that, we have this event. As we begin this section, Jesus is trying to get away once more to have some alone time with his disciples. The crowds have continued to find him wherever he has gone in Israel. And so He goes out of Judea into Gentile territory in the hopes of catching a break. Up until this point, the only other time he was out of Jewish territory was when he healed the demoniac in Decapolis in Mark 5. But once again, even when he is trying to be anonymous, he is interrupted. In v. 25, we read that a Greek woman whose daughter was possessed by an evil spirit comes to him. **Everything is working against her – she is Gentile, she is a woman, her daughter is demon-possessed.** If anyone was on the outside, it was her. There is no way that this would be appropriate for a male Jewish rabbi. But she comes anyways, and begs Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.

Now, Jesus' reply is one that has troubled people for years. It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs. On the surface it is offensive. Is he calling her a dog? What is that? He uses "kunarria" – household dogs, puppies, who would be under the table at meal time. Not the scavenger dogs. He is engaging her through the use of a parable, a story with a hidden meaning. First the children eat, then the dogs. I have come for the children of Israel. And then the Gentiles will be ministered to. But look at her response: Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs. She gets it! She does not take offense. She accepts

that she is not deserving, not one of the children of Israel. But she also persists in asking. And Jesus grants her request. In the Matthew version, we read that Jesus was amazed at her faith. *Matthew 15:28 - Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted."* He has put an enigmatic statement out to test her faith, and she gets it, and Jesus responds by granting her request.

This is a model of faith. I am not deserving. But I come to you anyways for healing. I do not think so highly of myself that I am offended by the fact that I need a Savior. But I do not think so lowly of myself that I will not accept the offer of salvation. I am not appealing to you on the basis of my goodness or my rights, but on the basis of your goodness.

Ephesians 2:8-9 - For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

3) The Pharisees saw religion as a fence to keep sinners out instead of as a call to bring everyone in to God

Matthew 23:13 - "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

Back to Jesus with the disciples in the boat. Jesus has just fed 4,000 in Gentile territory.

Jesus warned them. "Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod."¹⁶ They discussed this with one another and said, "It is because we have no bread."¹⁷ Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened?¹⁸ Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember?¹⁹ When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" "Twelve," they replied.²⁰ "And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" They answered, "Seven."²¹ He said to them, "Do you still not understand?"

It's not about bread. I am the Messiah. I am God in human form. This is not about bread. I am the bread of life for the world

John 6:30-35 - So they asked him, "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?"³¹ Our forefathers ate the

manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" ³² Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." ³⁴ "Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread." ³⁵ Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.

John 6:48-51 - *I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. ⁵⁰ But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."*

Jesus is the Messiah. All the stories and prophecies point to Him. He brings life to the world. And we similarly cross any barrier to bring the gospel to the world.

Matthew 28:18-20 - *Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

Acts 1:6-8 - *So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

As we come to His table, remember this. Beware the hard-heartedness and hypocrisy and legalism of the Pharisees. Go instead and bring the gospel of God's grace to everyone in the world.

We do not presume to come to this your table, merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in your manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table, but you are the same Lord whose property is always to have mercy. Thomas Cranmer, Book of Common Prayer

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