

## “Blind, Deaf, And A Little Bit Dumb”

On a foggy morning in the summer of 1952, a young woman named Florence Chadwick waded into the numbing cold water off Catalina Island. She planned to swim the 26-mile channel from the island to the California coast. Long-distance swimming was not new to her; she was the first woman to swim the English Channel in both directions.

The fog was so thick she could hardly see the boats in her party. She swam 15 hours then asked to be taken out of the water. Her trainer tried to encourage her to swim on since they were so close to land, but when Florence looked, all she saw was fog. So, she quit - one-mile from her goal. Later she said, "If I could have seen the land I might have made it." It wasn't the cold or fear or exhaustion that caused Chadwick to fail. It was the fog.

Sometimes we too fail, not because we're afraid or lack courage or because of anything other than the fact that we can't see where we are going. We lose sight of the shore. It is a challenge to follow Jesus when a fog bank blurs our vision. That fog could come in the form of fear, or worry, or confusion, or stress. Whatever the form, the fog clears as we grow in our understanding of who Jesus is. **We gain clarity in life as we gain clarity about Jesus.** When your understanding of Jesus grows clear, so does your vision. In Mark 8 Jesus gives His disciples a vision test. Mark's gospel records how a group of twelve average people gained their spiritual sight over time. Have you had your vision checked lately?

**Jesus extends a warm hand to the hungry. 8:1-10.** Does this miracle sound familiar? In chapter 6 Jesus fed 5,000. Here He feeds 4,000. Surely this must be a mistake. Whoever compiled these stories must have stuttered and recorded the same story twice. There are some interesting differences between the two stories. The first group of 5,000 is mostly Jews. The second group is mostly Gentiles. That may explain why the first group has 12 baskets, a Jewish number, and the second group 7, a number favored by Gentiles. But what is more important about the repeating of this miracle is the response of the Pharisees and Jesus' own disciples.

**Jesus offers a cold shoulder to the Pharisees. 8:11-13.** After this second miracle of a miraculous feeding the Pharisees ask for a sign. It is not uncommon that when our vision gets blurry, we look for a sign. A sign is something that points beyond itself to something greater. Jesus often did something miraculous then added a sermon to interpret the sign. For example, in John's telling of the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus follows with the claim, "I am the bread of life." The disciples **cannot** see but the Pharisees **will not** see. They remind me of a scene from an old movie starring Steven Martin...Man With Two Brains.

The Pharisees wanted a sign but what they got from Jesus was a sigh. (v. 12). How many miracles must He perform before these guys stop asking for a sign? The Pharisees aren't the only ones who are blind and deaf and a little bit dumb. The disciples are in the same boat – the wrong boat.

**Jesus issues a stern warning to His disciples. 8:14-21.** They get in a boat with Jesus and He warns them, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod." "Leaven" *was a common Jewish metaphor for an invisible, pervasive, corrupting influence.* In this context the Pharisees reject the truth and increasingly harden their hearts to Jesus. The response of the disciples is almost humorous...v. 16. They completely missed the point. Jesus lays into them with eight questions in vv. 17-21.

Their problem is not bread – the Bread is in the boat! **If you have the Bread of Life in your boat you'll never go hungry.** Then what's going on here? These guys aren't stupid. They have seen Jesus exercise authority over nature, demons, sickness and death and feed thousands with a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish. Why do they still not get it? The answer was found in 6:52, "for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened." They had a heart problem. One of the symptoms of a hard heart is the failure for information to impact your life. You can be intimately familiar with details about Christ and miss the significance of Christ. "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, <sup>40</sup> yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life." (Jn. 5:39-40). They missed the point. It happens to us all the time. You know I had a heart attack. God orchestrated that emergency so that all the right people were in the right places to save my life. I saw Jesus in all of it...until the medical bills started coming in. Do you suppose I said, "The same God who bore

me on eagle's wings and saved my life will pay these bills?" No, I said, "Where are we going to get the bread to pay these bills?"

Is there a solution to this problem? Fortunately, there is. The key to understanding what Mark is trying to say to us is found in the miracles just before and just after the feeding of the 4,000. In 7:31-37 opens the ears of a deaf man. But let's look at the miracle just after the feeding episode.

**Jesus improves the vision of those who believe. 8:22-26.** This two-stage healing process is puzzling. What's going on here? Is Jesus just having an "off" day? Has He done so many miracles that He is losing a little of His healing power? What Jesus is doing here is genius. His actions with this blind man provide the perfect conclusion to the first major section of Mark's gospel. The emphasis from the beginning of this book is the identity of Jesus Christ. John the Baptist knows who He is. God the Father knows who He is. Jesus knows who He is. The demons know who He is. The desperate people on the margins of society know who He is. The only two groups who aren't sure who He is are the Pharisees and sadly, His own disciples. It is no big surprise when proud, self-sufficient people reject Jesus. It is a little surprising when those who signed up to follow Him lose sight of who He is. But the healing of this blind man is a hopeful sign for the disciples. Their vision is still a little blurry and will continue to be. But, as we will see next week, (I don't want to steal Chris Young's thunder) their vision will improve over time until, after the resurrection when they will see things clearly.

So, how's your vision? What do you see when you look at your current circumstances? What do we see in the future for this church? If we fail to see Jesus for who He is then what difference is there between us and those who do not acknowledge Him as Lord?

**A follower of Jesus sees all of life through who He is. Jesus will provide. He can open the eyes of the blind and open the ears of the deaf, but we can't afford to be dumb.** God always provides. When the world was destroyed by a flood God provided a boat. When Abraham was about to take the life of his only son God provided a ram. When the Israelites were slaves in Egypt God provided a lamb. When everyone did what was right in their own eyes God provided a godly woman named Deborah. When

Israel was a captive in Babylon God provided a prophet. When Jesus died on a cross and the hopes of His disciples died with Him, God provided a resurrection. When the Romans crucified Christians, God provided the Holy and the gospel spread like wildfire. And in a stroke of delicious irony, Rome even built the roads to insure the spread the Good News all over the world.

Your vision might be a little blurry this morning. You may be living in a fog bank and you can't see the shore. You can put God to the test like the Pharisees did and ask for a sign or you can go forward by faith knowing that God always provides.

Which boat are you in? Are you in the same boat as the Pharisees? Get in the boat with Jesus and trust Him. Let Jesus open your eyes and ears and help you perceive how your present circumstances will work out of the greater progress of the gospel. He will do it. He always has. He always will.

Two months after she failed to swim from Catalina to Long Beach, Florence Chadwick walked off the same beach into the same channel and swam the distance, setting a new speed record, because she could see the shore.

Pray

Communion - If you are looking for a sign, here it is. The bread and the cup. <sup>32</sup> Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. <sup>33</sup> For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." <sup>34</sup> They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." <sup>35</sup> Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

Let this act of communion be your act of faith, your declaration that you will walk by faith and not by sight.

# FOLLOW

JESUS THROUGH THE BOOK OF MARK

PART 1: FOLLOW THE PERSON OF JESUS



**WE GAIN CLARITY IN LIFE AS WE GAIN CLARITY ABOUT JESUS.WE  
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JESUS EXTENDS A WARM HAND TO THE HUNGRY.

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."

MARK 8:1-10



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 8:1-10

**JESUS OFFERS A COLD SHOULDER TO THE PHARISEES.**

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 8:11-13

**JESUS ISSUES A STERN WARNING TO HIS DISCIPLES.**

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."

MARK 8:14-21

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 8:14-21

**JESUS IMPROVES THE VISION OF THOSE WHO BELIEVE.**

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."

MARK 8:22-26