

## Lesson Seven

(Mark 8:1-9:29)

### Jesus Feeds Four Thousand People

(Mark 8:1-10)

**8** *Not long afterward, another large crowd came together. When they had nothing left to eat, Jesus called the disciples to him and said, 2 “I feel sorry for these people, because they have been with me for three days and now have nothing to eat. 3 If I send them home without feeding them they will faint as they go, because some of them have come a long way.”*

*4 His disciples asked him, “Where in this desert can anyone find enough food to feed all these people?”*

*5 “How much bread do you have?” Jesus asked. “Seven loaves,” they answered.*

*6 He ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground. Then he took the seven loaves, gave thanks to God, broke them, and gave them to his disciples to distribute to the crowd; and the disciples did so. 7 They also had a few small fish. Jesus gave thanks for these and told the disciples to distribute them too. 8 Everybody ate and had enough -- there were about four thousand people. 9 Then the disciples took up seven baskets full of pieces left over. Jesus sent the people away, 10 and at once got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.*

It should be no surprise that during three and a half years of public ministry, Jesus would do similar miracles many times. It does seem strange that the disciples had so much trouble understanding what He could *do*, yet we all know how hard it is to overcome preconceived ideas. Mark and Matthew give almost identical statements of this miracle, with Mark adding in verse three, “because some of them have come a long way.” In the feeding of the five thousand, they sat down on the green grass. Here they sit on the ground. This implies it is later in the year when the grass has been dried up by the sun’s heat. This would be evidence that we are dealing with two separate events. Jesus settles this question by mentioning both in verses 19-20.

The crowd had been with Jesus three days. As the Jews counted time, this could mean one whole day and parts of preceding and following days (not necessarily 72 hours). This shows the intensity of their interest in him. But they have stayed so long that they have eaten up all their supplies and now have nothing left. Jesus could have sent them away to take care of themselves. But, once again, we see the sympathy of Jesus for us human beings. His concern for the well-being of his followers, indicates his concern for our spiritual health as well. As Jesus looks at the crowd, he is aware that some would faint from hunger if they attempted to return home without food.

The disciples ask, “Where in this desert can anyone find enough food to feed all these people?” This may be a hint to Jesus to perform another miracle. But it may also be evidence of their stupidity. Compare verses 17-21. This is the way it is in times of crisis. We forget the things which God has done in the past. Each new crisis seems impossible to deal with, and each new crisis makes it seem we have used up our

allotment of God's grace. God parts the waters of the Red Sea, and as soon as Israel is across, they begin to complain against God because there is no water to drink.

The mechanics of the miracle are quite similar to the feeding of the five thousand. The numbers of loaves and fish are different, but the result is the same. Everyone eats their fill, and once again the leftovers are gathered up, filling seven baskets. (These are large baskets this time, almost large enough to hold a man.) The identity of the people who make up this crowd remains a mystery. From the fact that Jesus and the disciples got into the boat and went to Dalmanutha (in the territory of Magadan), the feeding must have taken place in the territory of the Ten Towns (Decapolis). If this is correct, the crowd could have been Gentile, and the purpose of the account may be to show how Jesus fed Gentiles after He had fed Jews (compare Mark 7:27). This could also explain why Mark uses some of his precious space to record two such similar miracles. Dalmanutha (not otherwise identified) was evidently near Tiberias on the western shore, and might have been the same as Magdala.

### **Belief and Unbelief**

*(Mark 8:11-26)*

*11 Some Pharisees came to Jesus and started to argue with him. They wanted to trap him, so they asked him to perform a miracle to show God's approval. 12 Jesus gave a deep groan and said, "Why do the people of this day ask for a miracle? No, I tell you! No such proof will be given this people!"*

*13 He left them, got back into the boat, and started across to the other side of the lake.*

*14 The disciples had forgotten to bring any extra bread, and had only one loaf with them in the boat. 15 "Look out," Jesus warned them, "and be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod."*

*16 They started discussing among themselves, "He says this because we don't have any bread."*

*17 Jesus knew what they were saying, so he asked them, "Why are you discussing about not having any bread? Don't you know or understand yet? Are your minds so dull? 18 You have eyes -- can't you see? You have ears -- can't you hear? Don't you remember 19 when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand people? How many baskets full of leftover pieces did you take up?" "Twelve," they answered.*

*20 "And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand people," asked Jesus, "how many baskets full of leftover pieces did you take up?" "Seven," they answered.*

*21 "And you still don't understand?" he asked them.*

*22 They came to Bethsaida, where some people brought a blind man to Jesus and begged him to touch him. 23 Jesus took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village. After spitting on the man's eyes, Jesus placed his hands on him and asked him, "Can you see anything?"*

*24 The man looked up and said, "Yes, I can see people, but they look like trees walking around."*

*25 Jesus again placed his hands on the man's eyes. This time the man looked hard, his eyesight came back, and he saw everything clearly. 26 Jesus then sent him home with the order, "Don't go back into the village."*

It is surprising that not even the miraculous feeding of hungry crowds was enough to satisfy and convince the Pharisees (compare John 6:25-31). But then the problem was not one of sufficient evidence (of which there was more than enough). They ask for some great sign in the heavens, which only God could do, to prove to them that Jesus is who he says he is. But they have already decided *not* to believe! Any faith which must be based upon great signs and wonders is no faith at all. Such faith doesn't involve any real change of attitude (compare Luke 16:30-31). Mark shows Jesus saying, "No such proof will be given to these people!" Matthew (on an apparently different occasion) has Jesus saying, "The only miracle you will be given is the miracle of Jonah." A Jewish person would understand this, and it was to be the *ultimate act* of Jesus. This would be *God's act in Christ to set us free!!!* Compare Acts 13:29-37. As the great fish finally gave up Jonah, so did death and the grave give up Jesus who was God the Son.

Jesus had performed miracles before this, and he did continue to do such things. What he says in verse 12 must be taken as meaning that he will make no attempt to *force* belief on those who refuse to believe. As we see him, he continued to bless those who were willing to believe and he healed and saved such people. Those who believed found plenty of evidence to confirm their faith!

Next we see Jesus warning his disciples against the evil influence of the Pharisees and Herod. Why is Herod included? Compare Luke 13:31-32. But the disciples have their priorities mixed up, and they think the most pressing problem is that they have no food in the boat. And so they mistakenly associate the mention of "yeast" ("leaven") with the lack of bread. This is the third time, then, that they seem totally unaware that Jesus is an inexhaustible source of food, since he can work miracles. "Have ye your heart yet hardened?" is better translated, "Are your minds so dull?" They can see and hear; they can remember; they saw the miracles of feeding the five thousand and of feeding the four thousand. Have they so soon forgotten his ability to provide more than enough??? He sadly concludes: "*And you still don't understand?*"

Why would Mark include a second miracle of healing the blind (compare Mark 7:31ff.)? This incident is clearly a different one, since mention is made of a "two-staged" healing. Why two stages??? Perhaps to symbolize a two-level understanding of who Jesus is. Certainly He is a prophet, but to see him as only this and nothing more is comparable to "see people . . . like trees walking around." Vision, which has been blanked out, does not come back all at once. When sight is gained, it is still ineffective if the mind cannot interpret it. We may see the human side of Jesus, but be completely unaware of the *divine* (see 2 Cor. 5:16). He is the *perfect light*, and the haze and twilight will be overcome as we learn more of His real work and His teaching. He is God's complete *Message* to us (see Heb. 1:1-2).

### **Peter's Declaration About Jesus** (Mark 8:27-9:1)

*27 Then Jesus and his disciples went away to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Tell me, who do people say I am?"*

*28 "Some say that you are John the Baptist," they answered; "others say that you are Elijah, while others say that you are one of the prophets."*

*29 "What about you?" he asked them. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Messiah."*

*30 Then Jesus ordered them, "Do not tell anyone about me."*

*31 Then Jesus began to teach his disciples: "The Son of Man must suffer much, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the Law. He will be put to death, and after three days he will rise to life." 32 He made this very clear to them. So Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 But Jesus turned around, looked at his disciples, and rebuked Peter. "Get away from me, Satan," he said. "Your thoughts are men's thoughts, not God's!"*

*34 Then Jesus called the crowd and his disciples to him. "If anyone wants to come with me," he told them, "he must forget himself, carry his cross, and follow me. 35 For whoever wants to save his own life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. 36 Does a man gain anything if he wins the whole world but loses his life? Of course not! 37 There is nothing a man can give to regain his life. 38 If, then, a man is ashamed of me and of my teaching in this godless and wicked day, then the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."*

*9 And he went on to say, "Remember this! There are some here who will not die until they have seen the Kingdom of God come with power."*

The integrative center of the gospel is found in Peter's declaration (confession): "You are the Messiah." ("Christ" means "Messiah.") At this point in time, the Messiahship was a *realized fact!* "*The Word became a human being. . .*" (John 1:14; compare 1 John 1:1-4). Even though the disciples were incapable of understanding the true meaning of this (see John 16:12-15), the Spirit would lead them into all the truth. Matthew shows Jesus answering Peter's declaration by saying: "*For this truth did not come to you from any human being, but it was given to you directly by my Father in heaven*" (Matt. 16:17). If we are to be truly biblical, then we must center our faith on ". . . the revelation of the secret truth which was hidden for long ages in the past, but now has been brought out in the open . . ." (compare Rom. 16:25-26; 1 Tim. 3:16).

It is important to know who Jesus is!!! The people were saying that He was John the Baptizer come back from the dead (compare Mark 6:14-15); or that He was Elijah (compare Malachi 4:5-6; but see Mark 9:11-13); or that He was one of the prophets who was to herald the coming of the Messiah. Peter identifies Jesus as *The Messiah*, and Jesus accepts this title as true. But it was not yet time to make a public claim of this fact. To do so would cause trouble with the authorities, lead to wrong ideas in the minds of the people, and precipitate a crisis before the proper time. Note that Jesus reveals a new fact about himself by using the title, "Son of Man." This is one of Jesus' favorite titles for himself (he uses it some 80 times in the Gospels). Note how the Jews thought of it (see Luke 22:69-70). "Son of God" identifies Jesus as the Great King. "Son of Man" shows God's Holy One who is despised and scorned by everyone and who suffers punishment because of us (see Psalm 22; 69; 118; Isa. 50; 52; 53; Zech. 13:7). Jesus speaks of his

coming death and resurrection. But this is too great a shock for Peter. It is ironic that the one who declared Jesus to be the Messiah, now rebukes Him for speaking of death. In doing so, Peter has assumed the role of Satan, and Jesus must rebuke him.

Jesus also speaks to the larger group of people and tells them that they must also expose themselves to suffering and rejection (and of course be raised from death) for his sake. So important is the *gift of life in Christ Jesus*, that if a person could gain the whole world for himself but lose his life, he would have nothing! One may save his life for eternity only by giving it away temporarily (compare Rom. 12:1-2). Who can set a price for a person's life??? But God did this, by sending Jesus to be our sin-offering! The *price* God was willing to pay for *you* as an individual was *Christ-on-the-cross!!!* How does a person lose his life??? By refusing to reach out through faith to seize Jesus and hold on firmly to him. A person's eternal destiny depends upon his or her seizing Christ by faith *in this present world*. (Note: PSUCHE is translated "life" in verse 35, and many think it should be so translated in verses 36-37, as the scholars of the TEV, RSV, NEB, NIV footnote, etc., have done. McGarvey renders it this way in *The Fourfold Gospel*. The Bible presents man as a *unity* in 1 Thess. 5:23, and teaches the *resurrection of the body* in 1 Cor. 15, etc.)

In 9:1 Jesus predicts that the Kingdom of God would come within the normal lifespan of some who were in his audience at that time. When the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost, Peter explained what had happened by saying, "*This is what the prophet Joel spoke about.*" Less than forty years later, Paul could say, "He rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us safe into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Col. 1:13). Compare the parallel accounts in Matt. 16:28; Luke 9:27.

## **The Transfiguration**

*(Mark 9:2-13)*

*2 Six days later Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. As they looked on, a change came over him, 3 and his clothes became shining white, whiter than anyone in the world could wash them. 4 Then the three disciples saw Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus. 5 Peter spoke up and said to Jesus, "Teacher, it is a good thing that we are here. We will make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 6 He and the others were so frightened that he did not know what to say.*

*7 A cloud appeared and covered them with its shadow, and a voice came from the cloud, "This is my own dear Son -- listen to him!" 8 They took a quick look around but did not see anyone else; only Jesus was with them.*

*9 As they came down the mountain Jesus ordered them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has risen from death."*

*10 They obeyed his order, but among themselves they started discussing the matter, "What does this 'rising from death' mean?"*

*11 And they asked Jesus, "Why do the teachers of the Law say that Elijah has to come first?"*

*12 His answer was, "Elijah does indeed come first to get everything ready. Yet why do the Scriptures say that the Son of Man will suffer much and be rejected? 13 I tell you, however, that Elijah has already come, and that people did to him what they wanted to, just as the Scriptures say about him."*

The high mountain must have been Mt. Hermon (10,000 feet), since Mt. Tabor had a town and a fortress on its top. Peter, James, and John, seem to be the inner circle of those closest to Jesus. These three men were eyewitnesses of the Divine Glory of this One who was the Son of Man. This confirmed the Messiahship of Christ which Peter had declared. Mark tells us: "*As they looked on, a change came over Jesus, and His clothes became shining white -- whiter than anyone in the world could wash them.*" This is symbolic of the supernatural, and of the Divinity of Jesus the Christ. (We also have a share in this as well, see 1 John 3:2.) Both Moses and Elijah were special in Jewish thinking. Elijah had not died at all (2 Kings 2:11). Moses, at the moment of death, was snatched bodily from the Devil's power (Jude 9; Deut. 34:6). This was not a *vision*, but both had really come from the world of the dead (Hades) to be with Jesus at this time. Note they were talking with Jesus. Luke tells us: "... and talked with Jesus about the way in which he would soon fulfill God's purpose by dying in Jerusalem." (Luke 9:31). God chose to make this *historical act* of Jesus' death to be the focal point of his saving grace. Compare Heb. 9:15; 10:9-10; Col. 1:20.

In Jewish thinking, Moses was the representative of the law; Elijah of the prophets (compare Matt. 7:12). Peter has seen the spiritual power of a small piece of eternity here, and he thinks something ought to be done to honor the occasion. Small tents or booths were made for the Feast of Tabernacles, which celebrated the time when the ancient Hebrews lived in tents. Perhaps Peter thinks that making three of these tents would keep Moses and Elijah from returning to the world of the dead, and that this would bring about the "earthly kingdom of the Messiah" that the Jews were expecting. Mark points out that they really did not know what they were saying (verse six). A shining cloud appeared, which would immediately be taken by the disciples as showing the presence of God. The same voice which spoke at Jesus' baptism, now confirms what Peter had declared. "*This is my own dear Son -- listen to him!*" Luke tells us that when the voice stopped, there was Jesus all alone. In this way God was showing that Moses (the law) and Elijah (the prophets) were fulfilled and superseded. "*But in these last days he has spoken to us through his Son*" (Heb. 1:2). The work of the Old Testament portion of the Bible was to prepare the world for the coming of Messiah. Jesus is the person around whom the entire Bible centers! Jesus is the "go-between" who arranges a new covenant between God and mankind (it is a "will" to us humans, see Heb. 9:15-18).

Jesus pointed toward a special resurrection of the Son of Man, and this they did not understand, nor could they until Jesus had in fact risen from death. The proper time for telling these things would be *after* Jesus had finished his work on the cross. John the Baptizer came in the "spirit and power of Elijah." Compare Malachi 3:1; 4:5 with Mark 1:1-3. John was killed (Matt. 14:6-12), and Jesus was to be killed also. (Judaism was superseded in Christ and the new covenant. John fulfilled the prophecy, and we do not look for a "third Elijah." If Christianity needed to be "restored," a Jewish prophet would be out of place. One of the apostles would better fit the job.)

## **If You Yourself Can!**

*(Mark 9:14-29)*

*14 When they joined the rest of the disciples, they saw a large crowd there. Some teachers of the Law were arguing with the disciples. 15 As soon as the people saw Jesus, they were greatly surprised and ran to him and greeted him. 16 Jesus asked his disciples, "What are you arguing with them about?"*

*17 A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, because he has an evil spirit in him and cannot talk. 18 Whenever the spirit attacks him, it throws him to the ground, and he foams at the mouth, grits his teeth, and becomes stiff all over. I asked your disciples to drive the spirit out, but they could not."*

*19 Jesus said to them, "How unbelieving you people are! How long must I stay with you? How long do I have to put up with you? Bring the boy to me!" 20 They brought him to Jesus. As soon as the spirit saw Jesus, it threw the boy into a fit, so that he fell on the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. 21 "How long has he been like this?" Jesus asked the father. "Ever since he was a child," he replied. 22 "Many times it has tried to kill him by throwing him in the fire and in the water. Have pity on us and help us, if you possibly can!"*

*23 "Yes," said Jesus, "if you can! Everything is possible for the person who has faith."*

*24 The father at once cried out, "I do have faith, but not enough. Help me have more!"*

*25 Jesus noticed that the crowd was closing in on them, so he gave a command to the evil spirit. "Deaf and dumb spirit," he said, "I order you to come out of the boy and never go into him again!"*

*26 The spirit screamed, threw the boy into a bad fit, and came out. The boy looked like a corpse, so that everyone said, "He is dead!" 27 But Jesus took the boy by the hand and helped him rise, and he stood up.*

*28 After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive the spirit out?"*

*29 "Only prayer can drive this kind out," answered Jesus; "nothing else can."*

*"Just as I am! Without one plea, But that Thy blood was shed for me, And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee, O Lamb of God, I come! I come!"* These familiar words were written in the last century by Charlotte Elliott, who "never knew a well day," though she lived to see her eighty-second year. The song is particularly appropriate for this miracle of Jesus.

From the celestial glory of the Transfiguration we come back into the world of human need. Faith is the means by which we seize the promise and power of God in order to overcome the "world." Matthew, Mark, and Luke each give independent versions of this healing, with Mark giving the most detail. Only Mark gives the key statement of verse 23: *"Yes, if you yourself can!"* (This follows the corrected Greek text.) DeWelt understands Jesus to be saying: "You have inquired about ability and whether any help is possible, but you have misplaced the question. The question of ability is in you, not in me. Faith is the secret of ability and of possibility. The power is sufficient on my part; is it on yours? I can give, but can you receive?" The father

understands and immediately responds: “*I do have faith, but not enough. Help me have more!*” DeWelt understands the father to be saying: “I believe, and yet my faith is scarcely worthy of the name; I hardly dare to call it faith or to plead by it as a believing man. Yet do not wait for something better, but grant my prayer, even to this faith which is no faith. I do believe; but if my belief is no better than unbelief, still heal my son. Do not sternly judge my faith, but help me as I am.” There is no contradiction in this, since as the father stops to study his own faith, he is deeply aware of his great need for faith, and this is the beginning of his relationship with Jesus.

The boy has the symptoms of epilepsy, but the real cause in this case is an evil spirit. (In the language of King James, *lunatic* means *epileptic*.) There must be something unusual about this incident. Mark shows us the disciples and the teachers of the law arguing -- evidently about why the disciples failed to heal the boy. Probably they said that since the disciples couldn’t do it, neither could Jesus. But why did the disciples fail??? They had been given power (Mark 6:7). Remember that Peter, James, and John, the three leading disciples, had been with Jesus. It was the other nine who have failed. Alford says the rebuke in verse 19 is not specifically to either the disciples or the father, but to people in general. In this we see the contrast between “heaven open and the sons of glory on the mountain,” and the “valley of misery, pain, and unbelief.” However, Matthew shows Jesus telling the disciples that the reason for their failure was *their unbelief* (Matt. 17:19-20). Mark shows him saying, “Only prayer can drive this kind out, nothing else can.” (“Fasting” is not in the corrected text.) This must be an extreme case, one which will yield only to faith which uses all the means of strength. Faith reaches out through prayer to seize the power of Christ. Prayer is the “spoken expression of faith and the active appeal to God for His help to give more faith.” Even when faith is weak, Jesus will help those who call upon Him!

Do not think of prayer (and fasting) as a *ritual of exorcism*, but rather as general principles of Christian growth. When *faith* focuses on God’s ACT in Christ, we forget self and can do many things through Christ. When *faith* turns inward to self, we cannot drive out the “evil spirits” of worldliness, selfishness, greed, immorality, etc. Compare Peter’s example in Matt. 14:29-30.

### **Questions for Discussion**

(Mark 8:1 - 9:29)

1. Would it make any difference if the accounts of feeding the five thousand and of feeding the four thousand were actually two versions of the same event?
2. Were the four thousand, Gentiles? Why?
3. Show at least three specific differences between the two feedings.



4. Why did the disciples ask the question of verse four?
5. Why didn't Jesus ask the disciples to give the people something to eat, as he did before?
6. In what way does Mark show the stupidity of the disciples? Is that the way we act? What can we do about it?
7. Just what kind of sign did these Pharisees want from Jesus?
8. How was their spiritual blindness indicated?
9. What was the true sign which they failed to recognize? Compare Matthew 12:38-42.
10. Jesus asked three questions in verse 17. How do they relate to the disciples? How do they relate to us today?
11. Did Jesus actually spit on the eyes of the blind man? Why would he do this?
12. What could have been the purpose in the two stages of healing the blind man?
13. Why does Jesus ask what the people are saying about him? In what way could he be like John, Elijah, or the Prophet?

14. What did Peter mean by his use of the name “Messiah” (“Christ”)?
15. What meaning is in “Son of Man” which Jesus applies to Himself?
16. Why look at all the disciples and then rebuke only Peter? In what sense was Jesus *not* speaking to Peter?
17. Show how the whole ministry of Christ appeared to the disciples to contradict their Messianic hopes.
18. What “time frame” does Jesus use to describe the coming “Kingdom of God”?
19. Was there some reason for taking three men with Him up a high mountain? Why these particular men?
20. Please give your definition of “transfiguration.” How was Jesus “changed” (compare Phil. 2:6)?
21. In what form did Moses and Elijah appear? How did Peter, James, and John recognize them?
22. Read Matt. 17:1-8; Luke 9:28-36 and tell what they discussed.
23. Why the declaration in verse seven at this time? What did it mean to those who heard it?
24. In what sense had Elijah already come? What was to be restored by Elijah?

25. Why had the teachers of the law followed the disciples? Why were they arguing?

26. The boy is described as an epileptic (Matt. 17:15). Is epilepsy always caused by evil spirits?

27. Who were the unbelieving people of verse 19?

28. Jesus used the words of the father to make a special appeal to him. What was this?

29. How did the father interpret the words of Jesus? In what sense did he believe? In what sense didn't he believe? How does the song, "Just As I Am" written by Charlotte Elliott, fit the father?

30. What rebuke and lesson for the disciples do you find in verse 29?