



UNIT 9 LESSON 5
MARK 7:24 - 8:26

The study passage for this lesson can be divided into 3 sections.

1. Chapter 7:24-37. An escape for Jesus from the oppressive Jewish atmosphere.
2. Chapter 8:1-21. A warning to the twelve about the Jews.
3. Chapter 8:22-26. The hope of spiritual sight (this section leads into the passage for Lesson 6).

1. **CAN JESUS ESCAPE THE OPPRESSIVE ATMOSPHERE OF THE JEWS? Chapter 7:24-37.**

- a) Read through this section and find the places mentioned in it in a Bible Atlas. In 7:24 Jesus goes to the non-Jewish area of Tyre. Commentators have suggested that Jesus needed the time of quietness to prepare himself for the coming important stage of his ministry. (8:27) Others have suggested that Jesus wanted to impart a lot of teaching to his disciples.

The crux of this section is the relationship between the Jews and the Gentiles. The New Testament reflects the tension that arose between the early Christians and the Jews. At first, the Christians were regarded as just another sect within Judaism (Acts 24:5). The Christians themselves saw it this way until certain unmistakable signs began to emerge which gave another indication. These included the confrontation of Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10,11) and the conflict over "circumcision" which gave rise to the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15 and Galatians). The Roman authorities regarded Christianity as a sect of Judaism at first. But later it became evident that there were big differences. The Jews began persecuting the Christians and even included an anathema in their synagogue service which effectively forced the Christians out. From then on it was apparent that the two would go their separate ways.

But there is still the problem of the relationship of the two groups in the plan of God. The miracle of the present passage is an indication of the overall attitude of Jesus. The woman has a right to have healing for her daughter, but Jesus' first obligation was to the Jewish people. The suggestion that non-Jews should enjoy the blessing of God often scandalised Jesus' hearers.

We are no doubt meant to see in the dialogue between Jesus and the woman (Mark 7:26-29) an example of Jesus' skill in repartee and of the woman's respect for Jesus and the well known Jewish customs (such as referring to Gentiles as "dogs"). Yet the woman's desperation and faith win the day for her. Herein lies the secret, that in the end it is faith that saves, whether a person be Jew or Greek.



- b) Trace the path of travel on your map as recorded by Mark 7:31. Perhaps Jesus had to make this long detour to get the time of peace and quietness he had been seeking. Finally arriving in Decapolis, (or Ten Towns) He finds an eager responsive group (7:36,37). It is not coincidence that the healing of the man among the tombs (5:1-20, esp. v20) took place in the same general area. This was a Gentile area, not touched directly by Jesus apart from one or two isolated incidents. The "evangelism" of the area was left to the men and women who had become believers. This strategy was also followed by Paul.

Most commentators point out that Jesus demonstrates extreme thoughtfulness for the feelings of the deaf and dumb man by taking him away from the crowd, and by going through what appears to be a miming of his message - the only means of communication with the man. (The blocked ears opened, spitting an impediment away from the tongue, the upward glance and sigh of prayer). (7:32-37)

The places in the New Testament where a word or two of Aramaic is preserved and quoted (e.g. 7:34) draw attention to particularly significant points in the episodes. A good story teller knows when to include such nice touches as a verbatim quotation.

The words of the crowd (v.37) are a reminder of the words of God in creation (Gen. 1:31). As this incident took place on Gentile ground some suggest we are to see the power of God working to set right again the creation which has been marred by sin.

2. CAN THE TWELVE SEE THE LESSONS? Chapter 8:1-21.

- a) The feeding of a large crowd in the general vicinity of the Ten Towns has sometimes been thought of as another version of the previous feeding miracle (6:30-44). Yet in both Matthew and Mark there are records of two feeding incidents; the mention of the word 'again' in 8:1 indicates that it was a second incident. This incident undoubtedly mentions the compassion of Jesus (8:2,3) a feature of Jesus' life and a feature of his followers' lives. In 8:8 the word for "basket" is "spuris" in Greek; this is not the same word as was used in 6:43, which was "kophinos". The "kophinos" was a smallish basket, shaped like a water jar, which Jews carried with them. There were twelve used, no doubt the 12 owned by the 12 disciples. But the spuris is a larger basket, rectangular and open, such as was used by Gentiles. It is the basket in which Paul escaped from Damascus (Acts 9:25). So the first feeding refers to the Jews and this one to the Gentiles -the whole of mankind is thus given the Bread of Life.
- b) This incident then prepared the way for the following two - verses 11-13 and 14-21. In the first the Pharisees reappear seeking a sign for proof that Jesus is authentic and as a trap for him. In the second, the Pharisees and other prominent people are held up to the Twelve by Jesus as bad examples, to be avoided at all costs. By now the Twelve should have enough spiritual resources to see through weaknesses of those who have opposed Jesus.



The request that the Pharisees made for a sign meets with the despair of Jesus (12,13 of Matthew 16:1-4). It is apparent that this is the central issue in all the dealings between men and God - whether or not a person can simply trust.

- c) The third incident in this section (verses 14-21), develops the warning implicit in verses 11-14. The disciples have a guilty conscience about forgetting the bread. This nearly prevents them from getting the point that Jesus was making.

Leaven or yeast was often referred to in the Bible. Of special importance were the ceremonies recorded in Lev. 2:23; Ex. 12, where unleavened bread was used, and the N.T. use of the term in 1 Cor. 5:7. The idea carried by these uses is that leaven is a symbol of evil and sin. So in Mark 8:15 Jesus warns the Twelve about the bad example of the Pharisees and Herod. It is incredible that the Twelve did not perceive what Jesus was saying to them (v17) but it is apparently the case.

The disciples, at this stage, were not far removed from the Pharisees and Herod in being more concerned with bodily matters, such as food and provisions, than with the Kingdom of God (Matt. 6:25-34). Jesus argues that the evidence of the feedings should be enough to show the Twelve that they are not going to be neglected by God - that they can "Seek the Kingdom of God first and all these things will be added unto them."

3. IS THERE ANY HOPE OF SPIRITUAL SIGHT? Chapter 8:22-26.

This section is a short transition to the passage for Lesson 6. The location, Bethsaida, is of interest because it was the home of Peter (Jn. 1:44). Perhaps this incident is recorded as a confession - Peter's own confession - that gradually he had begun to see the spiritual truth that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. He was aware of Jesus' patience and compassion and His touch of grace, which brought sight, but not without corresponding effort on his part (the man looked intently - v.25).

It is an interesting factor to notice that in many of the miracles there were those who believed who carried the patient to Jesus. This again occurs in the present incident. This may be a reflection of the contemporary church, the believing community in its intercessions. But of course there is always a reference to the faith of the individual himself. There is no explanation of the gradual nature of the cure. Perhaps it indicates that for some healing will be a gradual process. As healing takes place the person's faith increases and thus further healing can occur.

The dismissal of the man emphasises the desire of Jesus not to be known as a miracle worker. The stage is set for the following verses, which we take up in the next lesson.

**QUESTION 1:**

(Mark 7:24-30) Locate Tyre and Sidon. What apparently is Jesus' purpose in going so far into Gentile territory? (Compare Mark 6:31). What do you learn about the woman? Why does she come to Jesus? What do you observe about the way in which she comes? What unusual element appears in this healing?

QUESTION 2:

Mark 7:31-37. What are the specific stages in the healing of this man? Why may the deaf man not have been involved in the faith which brought him to Jesus? What three things does the deaf man experience? (v. 35).

QUESTION 3:

Mark 8:1-10. At first reading this incident seems to be the same as that described in Mark 6:30-44, but what are the distinct differences? What was Jesus' attitude toward the people and their needs in each incident?

QUESTION 4:

In Mark 8:11-13 what sort of sign may the Pharisees have in mind? What do we show about ourselves when we seek a sign? How does Jesus respond to the Pharisees at this point? Why?

QUESTION 5:

(Mark 8:22-26). Why, do you think, did Jesus heal this man in stages? Who initiated the incident? How did Jesus get the man himself involved in the healing? How was faith stimulated here?

QUESTION FOR GROUP STUDY:

Read Mark 8:11-21: Explain the warning Jesus gives to his disciples in verse 15. What attitude was typical of the Pharisees (Mark 7)? What attitude or way of life was typical of Herod (Mark 6)? How are these opposite ways of life equally dangerous? Is there a warning for you?