LESSON *six*

THE POWER OF FAITH

Mark 7:1–8:38

GETTING STARTED

If you asked people in your church, "What is a Christian supposed to do?" what are some of the responses you might get?

Setting the Stage

During the first century, a group of Jewish leaders in Jerusalem kept their eyes on religious comings and goings. Their whole purpose was to find fault. When they saw something they didn't think was right, they sent an investigative committee to check it out.

In Mark 7, the Pharisees who approached Jesus and His disciples accused them of breaking the oral law. The Pharisees believed that when God gave the written law to Moses, he also gave an oral law . . . even though Scripture makes no mention of it. This oral law, in which they put their faith, was supposed to help people understand how to apply the law in everyday matters. But the oral law became such a priority that it actually shifted the focus from the intent of the law to a bunch of external things that really did not represent the law at all.

Jesus confronted His accusers on this occasion by quoting from Isaiah 29:13, in which the prophet described how the people's outward actions honored God while in reality they were far from Him. The Pharisees claimed to place a high priority on God's laws. Among other things, however, they used a loophole in their oral tradition to shield their money so that they could avoid taking care of their elderly parents. With their oral law they violated God's written commandment to "honor your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:12).

Jesus pointed out that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile that person—only what comes from within can defile. He redefined the concepts of spiritual cleanliness and uncleanliness. He called out the Pharisees on their hypocrisy . . . and thus made lethal enemies of them.

Exploring the Text

Defilement Comes from Within (Mark 7:1–23)

[1] Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to Him, having come from Jerusalem. [2] Now when they saw some of

His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault. 3 For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders. 4 When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other things which they have received and hold, like the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches.

5 Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?"

6 He answered and said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written:

'This people honors Me with their lips,
But their heart is far from Me.
7 And in vain they worship Me,
Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'

8 For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do."

9 He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. 10 For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' 11 But you say, 'If a man says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban"—' (that is, a gift to God), 12 then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, 13 making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do."

14 When He had called all the multitude to Himself, He said to them, "Hear Me, everyone, and understand: 15 There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which

come out of him, those are the things that defile a man. [16] If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!"

[17] When He had entered a house away from the crowd, His disciples asked Him concerning the parable. [18] So He said to them, "Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, [19] because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?" [20] And He said, "What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. [21] For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, [22] thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. [23] All these evil things come from within and defile a man."

1. How did the religious leaders negate the law of God with their tradition (see verses 9–13)?

2. Read Galatians 5:19–21. How do these works of the flesh compare with the things Jesus said defile a person (see Mark 7:21–22)? How are these different from what the religious leaders thought defiled a person?

Jesus Honors a Syro-Phoenician Woman's Faith (Mark 7:24–30)

[24] From there He arose and went to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And He entered a house and wanted no one to know it, but He

could not be hidden. [25] For a woman whose young daughter had an unclean spirit heard about Him, and she came and fell at His feet. [26] The woman was a Greek, a Syro-Phoenician by birth, and she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter. [27] But Jesus said to her, "Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs."

[28] And she answered and said to Him, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children's crumbs."

[29] Then He said to her, "For this saying go your way; the demon has gone out of your daughter."

[30] And when she had come to her house, she found the demon gone out, and her daughter lying on the bed.

3. In Jesus' response to the Syro-Phoenician woman, "children" refers to the Jewish people while "dogs" refers to the Gentiles (see verse 27). Why did Jesus give His message ("bread") first to the Jewish people?

4. Jesus' reply to the desperate mother may seem cruel, but the fact He spoke to a Gentile woman at all set Him apart from most Jewish men. What did the woman's response indicate about her understanding of Jesus' words (see verse 28)?

Jesus Feeds the Four Thousand (Mark 8:1–21)

[1] In those days, the multitude being very great and having nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples to Him and said to them, [2] "I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. [3] And if I send them away hungry to their own houses, they will faint on the way; for some of them have come from afar."

[4] Then His disciples answered Him, "How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?"

[5] He asked them, "How many loaves do you have?"

And they said, "Seven."

[6] So He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And He took the seven loaves and gave thanks, broke them and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and they set them before the multitude. [7] They also had a few small fish; and having blessed them, He said to set them also before them. [8] So they ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets of leftover fragments. [9] Now those who had eaten were about four thousand. And He sent them away, [10] immediately got into the boat with His disciples, and came to the region of Dalmanutha.

[11] Then the Pharisees came out and began to dispute with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, testing Him. [12] But He sighed deeply in His spirit, and said, "Why does this generation seek a sign? Assuredly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation."

[13] And He left them, and getting into the boat again, departed to the other side. [14] Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, and they did not have more than one loaf with them in the boat. [15] Then He charged them, saying, "Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod."

[16] And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "It is because we have no bread."

17 But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, "Why do you reason
because you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive nor understand?
Is your heart still 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 fragments did you take up?"

They said to Him, "Twelve."

20 "Also, when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many
large baskets full of fragments did you take up?"

And they said, "Seven."

21 So He said to them, "How is it you do not understand?"

5. This is the second account in Mark's Gospel of Jesus feeding a crowd of people (see 6:30–44). How do you explain the fact that the disciples seem to have forgotten Jesus' earlier feeding of a multitude?

6. Jesus departed from Dalmanutha after the confrontation with the Pharisees, which prompted Him to warn the disciples about the "leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod" (verse 15)? How did the disciples misinterpret His remarks (see verse 16)?

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ (Mark 8:27–36)

27 Now Jesus and His disciples went out to the towns of Caesarea
Philippi; and on the road He asked His disciples, saying to them,
"Who do men say that I am?"

28 So they answered, "John the Baptist; but some say, Elijah; and
others, one of the prophets."

29 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ."

30 Then He strictly warned them that they should tell no one
about Him.

31 And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer
many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and
scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32 He spoke
this word openly. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke
Him. 33 But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples,
He rebuked Peter, saying, "Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not
mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."

34 When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples
also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him
deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 35 For whoever
desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My
sake and the gospel's will save it. 36 For what will it profit a man if he
gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?"

7. Jesus had been ministering to the crowds alongside the disciples and certainly knew what the people were saying about Him. Given this, why do you think He asked the disciples, "Who do men say that I am" (verse 27)?

8. What were the requirements Jesus made for those who wanted to follow Him (see verses 34–35)? Why did Jesus call for such sacrifice?

Reviewing the Story

Faith is a recurring theme in Mark 7–8. The Pharisees and teachers of the law placed their faith in oral traditions—man-made rules and regulations they believed were the keys to righteousness. The Syro-Phoenician woman, though she was not a member of Jewish race, put her faith in Jesus—and the Lord answered her request to heal her daughter. Later, a crowd of thousands who followed Jesus to hear Him teach placed their faith in Him to feed them. Yet when the disciples discovered on their journey that they had only one loaf of bread to split among them, it didn't occur to them to put their faith in Jesus.

9. How does the story of Jesus' interaction with the Syro-Phoenician woman reveal that His ministry was to the Gentiles as well as to the Jewish people (see Mark 7:24–30)?

10. Jesus compared the hypocrisy of Herod and the Pharisees to leaven (see Mark 8:15). Why did Jesus consider hypocrisy so destructive?

11. When Jesus asked the disciples to recall the number of baskets of bread left over from both feedings of the multitudes, the disciples were able to provide the correct numbers (see Mark 8:19–20). What was Jesus trying to make them see by asking this question?

12. At the beginning of Jesus' ministry, Satan had offered Him the option of using the world's means to bypass His mission (see Matthew 4:8–9). How did Jesus recognize Satan's attempts to again distract Him from His mission through Peter's words (see Mark 8:33)?

Applying the Message

13. What safeguards can you set up to make sure you don't fall into hypocrisy?

14. Peter misunderstood Jesus' purpose, so Satan tried to use him as a stumbling block. What happens when people today misunderstand Jesus' identity and His purpose?

Reflecting on the Meaning

According to Mark 6, the disciples watched Jesus feed a multitude of people with only five fish and two loaves of bread. In fact, the disciples *participated* in the miraculous feeding. They distributed the food as Jesus handed it to them. After everyone in the crowd had eaten, the disciples collected the leftovers, which filled twelve small baskets.

Sometime later, a similar situation arose. Jesus fed a crowd using seven loaves of bread and a few fish. The Bible says 5,000 people were fed the first time and 4,000 were fed the second time. But those numbers only represented the men in the crowd. When you factor in the women and children who were present, the totals could be three to five times the number of men. So the disciples watched Jesus feed many thousands of people using the most meager provisions imaginable.

Immediately after the second miraculous feeding, Jesus and His disciples boarded a boat to sail to Dalmanutha. The disciples grew concerned, however. They had brought only one loaf of bread for the voyage, and they were afraid it wouldn't be enough to feed all twelve of them.

It's tempting to shake our heads at the disciples' short memory. Yet we do the same thing every time we worry. Worry reflects a lack of faith in Jesus. When we worry, we forget the miracles we have witnessed. We forget the extraordinary things Jesus has done for us. We forget the billions of tiny miracles that work together in harmony every nanosecond of the

day in order to sustain our lives on this planet. We imagine that whatever difficulty we are facing is somehow beyond Jesus' concern or power to do anything about.

A better solution is to prayerfully consider what Jesus has to work with—even if it is something seemingly small and insignificant, the equivalent of a single loaf of bread, and then in faith ask Him to do something incredible with it.

Journaling Your Response

What will you tell yourself the next time you start to worry?