

SOFTENING A HARDENED HEART

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Scripture: Mark 6 and 8

For our meditation this morning, I want us to draw from a couple of narratives that come out of the gospel according to Mark, chapters 6 and 8. I think we can pull them together and see what God has in store for us through His Word this morning.

Mark 6:33 starts by saying:

The people saw them going...

If we look at the previous verses, we find that the disciples have come back. They have gathered together with Jesus and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught. Then He says, "Come away to a secluded place and rest a while." I love that! it just reinforces for us that, every now and then, we need to come away and rest a while. Maybe that might be a good thought for you if you are close to burn out or tired. Even if you are in full time ministry, to hear those words, "Come away and rest a while" so that the Spirit of God can then begin to renew you and bring back focus and strength. I love the way Jesus tells His disciples, "Come away to a secluded place and rest a while." So they went away in a boat to a secluded place.

Mark 6:33-44

The people saw them going, and many recognized them and ran there together on foot from all the cities, and got there ahead of them. When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things. When it was already quite late, His disciples came to Him and said, "This place is desolate and it is already quite late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." But He answered them, "You give them something to eat!" And they said to Him, "Shall we go and spend two hundred denarii on bread and give them something to eat?" And He said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go look!" And when they found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." And He commanded them all to sit down by groups on the green grass. They sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food and broke the loaves and He kept giving them to the disciples to set before them; and He divided up the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied...

I love vs. 42, "They all ate and were satisfied." Nothing else! Everybody, five thousand of them whom the disciples had suggested sending back, now all had eaten of the five loaves and two fish that they had given Jesus. And after Jesus had blessed it, it had now fed everybody. They all ate and were satisfied.

... and they picked up twelve full baskets of the broken pieces, and also of the fish. They were five thousand men who ate the loaves.

Now this is a familiar narrative – the feeding of the five thousand. But let's flip to the 8th chapter of Mark's gospel and again it says:

Mark 8: 1-9

In those days, when there was again a large crowd and they had nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples and said to them, "I feel compassion for the people because they have remained with Me now three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way; and some of them have come from a great distance." And His disciples answered Him, "Where will anyone be able to find enough bread here in this desolate place to satisfy these people?"

What a question! Just before this, we have seen Jesus feed the five thousand. And now they're in a similar spot and Jesus tells them that He has compassion for them, and the disciples respond by saying, "Where are we going to find food to give them?"

And He was asking them, "How many loaves do you have?" And they said, "Seven." And He directed the people to sit down on the ground; and taking the seven loaves, He gave thanks and broke them, and started giving them to His disciples to serve to them, and they served them to the people. They also had a few small fish; and after He had blessed them, He ordered these to be served as well. And they ate and were satisfied; and they picked up seven large baskets full of what was left over of the broken pieces. About four thousand were there; and He sent them away after that.

Before we move on, I'd like us to see a couple of things:

- **Jesus was moved by compassion** – both in the first feeding of the five thousand and in the feeding of the four thousand.
- **The disciples really didn't know what Jesus could do** in this situation, although they knew and had seen the things that He had done, which were incredible miracles. Still, it hadn't dawned on them that the one that they were following could do anything; that nothing was impossible for Him.

Mark 6:45-52

After He fed the 5000, Jesus made His disciples get into the boat, and go ahead of Him to the other side of Bethsaida, while He Himself was sending the crowd away. Then after bidding them farewell, He left for the mountain to pray.

When it was evening, the boat was in the middle of the sea, and He was alone on the land. Seeing them straining at the oars, for the wind was against them, at about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea; and He intended to pass by them. But when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed that it was a ghost, and cried out; for they all saw Him and were terrified. But immediately He spoke with them and said to them, "Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid." Then He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were utterly astonished, for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened.

They were astonished at what had happened when Jesus got into the boat, when the waves subsided. So much of power available to the Son of God, but when they saw it, coming on the heels of feeding of the 5000, they are astonished at what can happen with Jesus.

Then soon after the feeding of the four thousand, we see Jesus getting on the boat.

Mark 8: 10-13

And immediately He entered the boat with His disciples and came to the district of Dalmanutha. The Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, to test Him. Sighing deeply in His spirit, He said, "Why does this generation seek for a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation." Leaving them, He again embarked and went away to the other side.

Now here are the Pharisees who have already seen all the miracles that He is doing; the feeding of the 5000. News of that must have reached them or some of them may have even witnessed it. The feeding of the 4000, and yet they ignore all of that and go up to the Master and say, "Give us a sign."

Mark 8:14-15

And they had forgotten to take bread, and did not have more than one loaf in the boat with them. And He was giving orders to them, saying, "Watch out! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees...."

He was still talking about what the Pharisees were saying, asking for a sign; trying to impart some kind of warning to them. But they began to discuss with one another the fact that they had no bread. It might almost be humorous! As we look at it two thousand years away from this incident – that when baskets of bread had been left over, here they were, one loaf in their hand, wondering about bread.

8:16-21

They began to discuss with one another the fact that they had no bread. And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember, when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces you picked up?” They said to Him, “Twelve.” “When I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?” And they said to Him, “Seven.” And He was saying to them, “Do you not yet understand?”

It seems to me, as we read all of these passages tucked away in these chapters 6, 7 and 8, that Jesus is at the point where He wants them to know who He is, so that He can further impart more and more teaching. And yet, there seems to be a distance between their understanding; what they are seeing and hearing and what Jesus is trying to teach them. This huge gap is not getting bridged, because we see in **vs. 27-29** *Jesus went out, along with His disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way He questioned His disciples, saying to them, “Who do people say that I am?” They told Him, saying, “John the Baptist; and others say Elijah; but others, one of the prophets.” And He continued by questioning them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered and said to Him, “You are the Christ.”*

And we read in Matthew 16:15 that when Peter said that, Jesus says to Peter, “Blessed are you Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.”

Well, these are the passages that I wanted to bring to us as we begin to look at what God would have for us in these two chapters: the feeding of the five thousand and the four thousand, the Pharisees, the disciples talking about bread, and finally Jesus saying, “Who do you think I am? Who do people say that I am? Are they beginning to recognize that I am the One that they have been waiting for?”

But I want to come back to the disciples’ response and the way that Jesus questioned them. In ch. 8, as they begin to discuss with one another about bread. Jesus challenges them and says, “Why do you discuss this? Were you not there? When I fed five thousand, how many baskets remained.” “Twelve,” they said. “Were you not there when I fed four thousand? How many baskets remained?” “Seven.” Then He says to them, “Do you not see? Do you not hear? Are you so hardened that you are unable to see what you need to understand about the situation?”

Previously, we see that they had not got any insights about Him. So it seems like there is just a yearning from Jesus that they begin to understand who He is; that all that they are seeing and hearing can move to a softening of their hearts so that He can share more and teach them more about what He had in store for them.

Now I want us to move away from all that we have read, and turn the spotlight on our own hearts, and ask ourselves the question: Do we see Jesus? Do we see God in totality? Do we see Him as God who can take care of every aspect of our lives? or do we see Him in just little, little sections that give us a little amount of faith, and in the other areas we just go on with life quite oblivious to the fact that God is not present in those areas and we are not seeing the fullness of His power and His presence working in us, within us and through us?

What have you seen beloved, or heard about God must be the question that, as Jesus asked His disciples, that we need to ask ourselves today. What have we seen or heard?

- Maybe you've seen Him as your Protector. Maybe He's protected you from some harm, some danger, and so you know Him as a God who can protect.
- Maybe He has provided for you when you needed something very badly and God came through for you.
- Maybe you know Him as the Shalom, the One who can bring peace in your troubled situation. Maybe there's a situation when you felt that there was so much conflict that your peace was being taken away, and God brought a sense of stability and peace to you.
- Maybe you know Him as Healer; when He reached out and touched you at some point in our life when you were struggling with an ailment, and you felt His healing touch.
- Maybe you just know Him as Savior – He came, He saved you and you are a saved child today.

But let me ask you, as you look at these areas, do all of these areas translate into more faith and trust in God? Do you trust Him more because of these areas that you have? Jesus tells them three things:

- Having eyes, do you not see?
- Having ears, do you not hear?
- Do you not remember?

The question is, as you look at these areas that God has come through for you, do you remember these are things that God has been so faithful in the past, and use that knowledge to trust Him more and more in the future. Or beloved, is that just a static kind of faith? Those are areas that He helped you, that He came through for you; but that's what it was, and today you hold those things in your memory, but it doesn't in any way affect your walk with Him. It's not helping you to grow in faith. It's not helping you to trust Him more and more. So maybe you know Him as One who protects, or provides, or gives Peace, or is your Savior. But do you know Him as the One who can love you unconditionally? Or do you accept that you're an unloved person because people around you may not be loving you? And you say: That's just who I am. I really haven't asked God about love. Those are things I don't go to Him with. I know Him as this, but in terms of love, I don't know.

Maybe you're struggling with some area – a difficulty in your life, a shortcoming, or an addictive pattern, or some sin. And you keep falling and falling. Yet, you don't allow all the faith and trust that you had from the previous things that you knew about God to help you with this. They are silos by themselves, not in any way informing the things that are happening to you.

Or maybe you are lonely; you don't have friends. But you've never gone to God and said, "Lord I'm lonely. Would You connect me with friends? I need friends." You've never taken that to Him because you don't see Him in completeness, that He can do anything and everything for you. He is able to touch every area of your life in beautiful ways.

Or maybe you're not able to navigate hostile environments. You just start trying to do something about it in your own strength. And God is standing on the periphery; you haven't invited Him in. Maybe God is saying to you, "Invite Me in." Why do we need to invite Him in? Because our will is still in play. We still need to ask God to enter into our lives; give Him the permission to come in and help you through these difficult hostile situations or environments that you may be in.

Here's what I'm driving at, and I'm hoping that we can all come together in looking at the past and seeing all the areas that God has touched us in, and helping us to take those areas and say: Because of this, I know that He can help me in other areas as well. The disciples were astonished when the winds obeyed Him. But for Jesus it was nothing. If He can feed five thousand people, He can say anything to the winds and they will obey Him. That's not beyond His purview. Sometimes when God doesn't come through, we put that area of

our lives outside His purview. We cut Him out. It doesn't in any way stop us from being a Christian. No! we may attend services, we may read the bible, we may pray. But we will not bring that particular area to God because at some point when we were praying about something, He didn't come through on that area – for whatever reason. So we've taken that area out of our relationship with Him.

I was reading this book by Peter Gregg, "God on Mute". He talks about a couple who had a child and the child cried incessantly when she was young. They went to the Lord and prayed and prayed. But the child still cried. Nothing happened. The child was now grown up. They are well known in the church, they handle a cell group. And yet, in a moment when they were talking to the pastor, they said that they are able to pray for many people, for whatever people want. But they haven't prayed for something that they need. Somehow that one time when they prayed and asked God to touch this child, to stop the crying, and it didn't happen, they just said: We're not going to do that anymore. So life has gone by for them. They continue to be Christians and yet, the fullness of the Godhead and all that the Godhead can bring to them is not being lived out in them, because there is an area that they don't trust Him enough. They don't have faith.

The question for you and me is: **Is there an area of our heart that has become hard because of something that happened earlier?**

David Wilkerson said, "Some Christians are content to merely exist until they die. They don't want to risk anything to Believe God, to grow or mature. They refuse to believe His Word and have become hardened in their unbelief. Now they are living just to die."

Beloved, that's not the place that you and I need to be in – that we only believe God partially, that we are unable to, or have stopped taking everything to Him and saying, "Here's what is going on in my life. Will You help me? Will You give me wisdom, will You lead me through this? Will You help me deal with this?" Every area, I talk to Him as friend to friend, as one who is waiting to help. Is there an area in your life that is hardened, that is dead? That you can continue to go on doing all the things, that you think: This is enough for me. But in this area, I don't trust the Lord enough. And you've taken that area out and it's become hardened. The question that Jesus asked His disciples might be the question that He's asking you and me – "Having eyes, do you not see? Having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember?"

What is it that we can see that will restore softness in our spirits if we begin to see? What do we need to see? The bible tells us that we need to behold His glory.

ARE WE BEHOLDING HIS GLORY?

2 Corinthians 3:18 says, "But we all, with unveiled faces, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit."

2 Corinthians 3:13-17 "And are not like Moses, who used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away. But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart, but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

But we all, with unveiled faces, all of us, the veil has been removed. We behold as in a mirror the glory of the Lord. So, as we sing our songs of worship, as we read the Word, even now as we sit... Sometimes I think as we are now watching our services at home, whether this convenience is leading to a sense of complacency. If we were in church, we would have stood, raised our hands and worshipped. But now it feels like we sit down and are ready to be entertained. God forbid that should happen – that we lose track of the worship that must happen as we sing the songs and see the glory of God as we worship.

ARE WE HEARING HIS VOICE?

Do we hear His voice as we read the Word? Do we stop and say, "Lord, now that I've read this passage, I'm just going to be quiet and let You speak to me." And then we listen for Him. As we go to Him in prayer, do we spend time being quiet before Him and say, "Speak Lord, for I am listening."

ARE WE REMEMBERING HIS DEEDS?

One of our favorite songs at CAP is "Look what the Lord has done!" He healed my body, He touched my mind. Look what the Lord has done! Continue to remind yourselves of the amazing things that God has done for you and for me.

So, as we look at this passage and say: Lord, what can I take away from this?

God is a compassionate God. He is a kind Shepherd who takes care of His sheep.

Mark 6:34 "He saw a large crowd and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd and He began to teach them many things."

God is a kind God. He is your Shepherd and He is my Shepherd. Compassionate! He looks at you and me with compassion. He doesn't want to see hardened areas of our hearts, areas that we haven't yielded to Him, where we don't trust Him, that we may have got for whatever reason He didn't hear or didn't come thought the way we expected. So we've gone away in that area which has become dead and hardened.

I wonder whether God is saying, "Softening that area. Come back to Me. Open it up to Me because I can do something in that area." The gentle beautiful compassionate Shepherd reaches out to you and me this morning and He says, "Give Me those hardened areas; I can make them soft and malleable and moldable again. You need to trust Me in those areas so that the fullness of the Godhead can dwell in you and me."

Will you respond to Him, beloved? Would you take a moment, let the Spirit of God touch your heart, touch mine? See if there's anything, any area that has got calloused and hardened – an area that you have kept away from God? Then bring it before Him and say, "Lord, take it. I want to trust You completely." Now take this area or these areas as well. if the Lord is pointing out those areas, would you just bring it to the forefront of your thoughts and let's turn it over to Him and say, "Take Lord. I am bringing it to you."

Shall we pray?

Heavenly Father. You are searching our hearts right now. Your spotlight is on those hardened areas that we don't trust You in. But Lord today we want to yield those areas to You, Lord. we open our hands to You, our hearts and say, "Come! Deal with those areas. Help us to trust you in every area of our lives. make them tender and responsive to You again. We desperately want You to have full control of our lives so that we can experience You completely and Lord, as those areas become tender again, Lord help us to experience the fullness of joy and peace and contentment to know that we are exactly where You want us to be as Your children. In Jesus' precious beautiful majestic name, we pray. Amen