

Mark 8:1-26, The Trip Against the Pharisees
13-26, Return and Healing
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Overview

1. Another five-part trip, after the usual pattern. This time, the disciples are along again, and there is special teaching for them in the boat.
2. The event at the destination is unusual. We find not the usual outsiders, but the Pharisees, asking a sign!

A. 13-21, Return trip: Instruction to the Twelve

1. At the end of the journeys, the Lord wishes to emphasize to them the increasing opposition against him: "Beware the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod." Note the progression in opposition through the trips, and how it culminates in Herod and the Pharisees:
 - a) 5:7, the demons. Expected; remote. A Gentile.
 - b) 6:14ff, Herod. Closer impact of evil; supposed to be king of the Jews.
 - c) 7:1, the Pharisees. Even closer; supposed to be custodians of the Word of God.
 - d) 8:11-12, the Pharisees, now not just criticizing what he does, but trying to trap him.
2. The disciples are aware that someone forgot to bring the lunch; they are afraid he's criticizing them over this.
3. His rebuke to them is a long catalog of their failings.
 - a) They do not remember his ability to feed the multitudes. As the opposition to him increases, so does the power of his miracles. The Pharisees overlooked these miracles in their demand for yet another sign. Apparently, the disciples are little better off. They also overlook the miracles.
 - b) Their heart is hardened, like Pharisees (10:5). Recall 6:52, and the need to keep the heart with all diligence. The oil of the Spirit can soften it, but left unattended it will lead to death.
 - c) In particular, note 18, "Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not?" This is a quote from Jer. 5:21, which sets two conditions in parallel: rebellion (5:23, like the Pharisees), and lack of appreciation for the Lord's sovereign provision (5:24, like the disciples).
 - d) Bottom line: the same unbelief that works in the Pharisees is also working in them. This is the "leaven" of which they are to beware, and his exhortation is thus parallel to Heb. 3:12, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil

heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God."

B. 22-26: Miracle back home: a blind man healed

1. Similarity of this healing and that in 8:22
 - a) The crowd brings the sick person to the Lord and asks him to touch or lay hands on him.
 - b) The Lord takes the sick person apart from the crowd for the healing.
 - c) The healing includes the use of spittle and direct touch to the affected organ.
 - d) The healing is difficult for the Lord (7:34, the sigh; 8:24, incomplete results at first). "Groaned," used of our patient suffering under the conditions of this evil world, in Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 5:2. Heb. 13:17, opposite of joy.
 - e) The beneficiary is commanded not to tell anyone.
2. As there, so here the miracle particularly closely matches Isa 35:5,6, the four ailments to be healed by the Messiah: blind, deaf, lame, dumb. These miracles are a continuous response to the Pharisees' request for a sign, and show the Lord to be the promised Messiah. Cf. the inquiry of John the Baptist in Matt 11:2-6.
3. Why the two-stage healing? Probably for our encouragement, in two ways.
 - a) Encourages us as Subjects of the Lord's work. Shows the difficulty of grappling with the consequences of sin, to encourage us in our ministry to others. The Lord does not simply toss off healings and other miracles casually. He does them not as God, but as Man empowered by the Spirit, using the same resources we have. And like us, he feels the struggle:
 - 1) 5:8,13, It took two commands to exorcise the Gerasene demoniac.
 - 2) 5:30, he felt "virtue," *dynamis*, strength, go out of him when the woman touched him for healing.
 - 3) 7:34, He groans in the struggle to heal the deaf and dumb man.
 - 4) 9:25,27, Healing the man's demoniac son requires an exorcism required by a virtual resurrection.
 - 5) Application: When we feel wearied and stressed in our efforts to serve the Lord, we should draw encouragement from our Lord's example. For us as for him, it is a warfare, a struggle, one that requires repeated efforts. We, like he, shall succeed if we persevere. Gal. 6:9, "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

b) Encourages us as Objects of the Lord's work. Shows how resistant we are to full spiritual understanding, and how patiently the Lord persists until he finishes the job. This man seems to be a metaphor for the disciples, who have just been rebuked (8:18) for their similarity in spirit to the spiritual ailments of the two miracles that surround them. In the next section we shall see several examples of how slow they are to get the point. He has touched them and so they see more than others, but they do not yet see clearly, yet he does not give up on them, but patiently persists. So we should not be discouraged at our own slow progress. Phil. 1:6, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform [it] until the day of Jesus Christ."