

# **Lesson 9**

*Mark 8:11-38*

#### 4. Pharisees Request Sign from Heaven [8:11-13]

<sup>11</sup> *The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven.* <sup>12</sup> *He sighed deeply and said, "Why does this generation ask for a miraculous sign? I tell you the truth, no sign will be given to it."* <sup>13</sup> *Then he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side.*

- a. Not being satisfied with all the signs performed by Jesus thus far, the Pharisees craved for a sign from heaven [something spectacular] to prove that he was the Son of God and the Messiah. Jesus classifies the nation of Israel as represented by their leaders of Israel as “*a wicked and adulterous generation*” [Matt 12:39, 16:4; Lk 11:29] because they were hardened in their unbelief and kept running after more signs and wonders. Their motive behind the question was “*to test him.*” That is why Jesus refuses to give in to their demand. Infact, he was angry and distressed at their request.

Elsewhere in Matthew 12:38-40, 16:1-5 and Lk 11:16, 29-30, Jesus told the unbelieving Jews that demanded a sign that the only sign they would receive would be the sign of his resurrection.

#### Application

##### 1. Christ will not respond to a heart determined in unbelief.

The religious leaders that were constantly demanding for signs refused to believe the resurrection, the greatest sign of all, even when it occurred. Infact, they bribed the guards that were at the tomb of Jesus to deny the resurrection [Matt 28:11-15]. This is yet another proof of the fact that if a heart refuses to believe in Jesus through Scriptures, it will not believe in him by seeing miracles [Lk 16:30-31]. “*Faith comes from hearing the message*” [Rom 10:17].

The apostle Paul warns of the dangers of seeking miraculous signs as it will prevent one from truly believing in the real facts about Christ:

1 Corinthians 1:22-24 “<sup>22</sup> *Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom,* <sup>23</sup> *but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,* <sup>24</sup> *but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”*

While Christ will respond to true seeking faith even if it is as small as a mustard seed, he will not respond to a heart that is determined in unbelief.

#### For Reflection

- Did I come to Christ for forgiveness of sins by true repentance or for some earthly benefits?

## 5. Warning Concerning Yeast of Pharisees and Herod [8:14-21]

### Vv. 14-15

<sup>14</sup> *The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat.* <sup>15</sup> *“Be careful,” Jesus warned them. “Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod.”*

- a. The disciples in their hurry had forgotten to bring enough bread. Perhaps, as they were thinking about it, Jesus warns them to be on guard against the negative influence of the Pharisees and Herod.

A small amount of yeast [also called leaven] ferments a large amount of dough. In the Old Testament, yeast was strictly forbidden for certain types of offerings [Lev 2:11]. It was also prohibited in the Passover meal [Exod 12:8]. Due to these prohibitions, yeast came to be pictured as having an evil or corrupting influence. In this context, yeast refers to the teachings/influence of the Pharisees and that of Herod [see Matthew 16:12 for parallel account].

The teachings of the Pharisees focused on man-made traditions and pursuit of signs/wonders. Yet they maintained an outward show of religion. The influence of Herod is a little different. Matthew in the parallel account has Sadducees also mentioned [Matt 16:6]. The Sadducees controlled the priesthood and were very strong in Judea. They were able to do so because their interests and that of Herodians were similar. Both the groups had worldly desires [including political ambitions] and brought these worldly practices into Judaism. Thus they corrupted the religious life of an individual.

In summary, all these groups had nothing good to offer to the true follower of Christ.

### Vv. 16-21

<sup>16</sup> *They discussed this with one another and said, “It is because we have no bread.”* <sup>17</sup> *Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: “Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened?”* <sup>18</sup> *Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don’t you remember?* <sup>19</sup> *When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?”* *“Twelve,” they replied.* <sup>20</sup> *“And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?”* *They answered, “Seven.”* <sup>21</sup> *He said to them, “Do you still not understand?”*

- b. Jesus strongly rebuked the disciples' lack of spiritual understanding through a series of 6 questions [vv. 17-18, 21]. Their focus was only on food. Matthew in the parallel account adds the words of Jesus *“You of little faith”* [Matt 16:8]. Despite seeing multitudes miraculously being fed, the disciples were still so weak in their faith.

The Pharisees were hardened in their unbelief [8:11-13] and so was Herod [6:14-16]. Their corrupting influence was spreading and affecting many others around them. Jesus warns the disciples to be on guard against such negative influences.

## Application

### 1. Beware of the Influence of False Teachers.

Jesus strictly warned the disciples [and us] to be on guard against the teachings of the Pharisees and that of Herod. The two words “*be careful...watch out*” are in the present tense [i.e. always be careful...always keep watching], thus indicating the need for constant vigilance against false teachings and the negative influence of false leaders.

**Matthew 7:15-20** <sup>15</sup> “*Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.* <sup>16</sup> *By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?* <sup>17</sup> *Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.* <sup>18</sup> *A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.* <sup>19</sup> *Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.* <sup>20</sup> *Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.*”

**2 Peter 2:1-3** <sup>1</sup> “*But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves.* <sup>2</sup> *Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.* <sup>3</sup> *In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.*”

**Jude 3-4** <sup>3</sup> “*Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.* <sup>4</sup> *For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.*”

False teachers and their teachings have the potential of causing great damage [Gal 5:9]. True Christians should not encourage or support false teachers in any direct or indirect manner. Rather, false teachers must be exposed clearly in order to protect the purity of God’s church.

### 2. Past mercies of God should teach us to trust him for present needs.

The disciples remembered the feeding of the five thousand and that of the four thousand. Yet, they failed to learn from those incidents. It is one thing to remember God’s mercies in the past. It’s quite another thing to learn from it and **apply it for our present situations**.

Jesus was not pleased with their faith on that day and neither is he pleased when we live with such little faith. If God took care of us in the past, he will take care of us in the present and in the future. God says in Malachi 3:6 “*I the Lord do not change.*” Indeed, God “*does not change*” [Jas 1:17]. Therefore, we must learn to trust him in the present based on his past mercies.

## For Reflection

- Do I in any way directly or indirectly support those that teach error?
- Does my heart attitude show proof that God will meet all my present and future needs?

## 6. Healing of Blind Man at Bethsaida [8:22-26]

<sup>22</sup> They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. <sup>23</sup> He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?" <sup>24</sup> He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around." <sup>25</sup> Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. <sup>26</sup> Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't go into the village."

- a. This miracle is very different from the other miracles;
  1. healing took place in stages [though the stages did not have much time between them].
  2. Jesus took the man outside the village.
  3. Jesus used uncommon methods [use of saliva].
- b. That this person was not born blind can be seen from the fact that he recognized trees when he saw them [v. 24].
- c. It is perhaps best to see this miracle in the light of its context as yet another proof that Jesus was giving as to his Messiahship [incident is between 8:14-21 and 8:27-30].

Isaiah 35:5 clearly says that under the rule of the Messiah "*the eyes of the blind [will] be opened.*" In addition, when John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask Jesus if he was the Messiah, Jesus said "...Go back and report to John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup> *The blind receive sight...*" [Matt 11:4-5]. Notice Jesus mentioning blind receiving sight as a proof of his identity.

Thus, this healing was primarily for the benefit of the disciples in order for them to clearly understand the true identity of Jesus. Despite the fact that the disciples were very slow in their learning process, Christ's abundant patience with them is remarkable. God graciously reveals more of himself in order that people may come to have a true understanding of him.

## 7. Peter's Confession of Christ [8:27-30]

<sup>27</sup> Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?" <sup>28</sup> They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." <sup>29</sup> "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ." <sup>30</sup> Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

- a. Caesarea Philippi was 25 miles north of Bethsaida near the slopes of Mount Hermon on what is presently known as Golan Heights. Caesarea Philippi was once a place known for Baal worship. Even today, the place is called Banias, formerly known as Panias. It was believed that the Greek God, Pan, the God of nature was born here. In addition, Herod the Great had erected a magnificent temple there in honor of the Roman Emperor Augustus. Roman emperors were regarded as gods in those days. Philip the Tetrach enlarged the city and renamed it as Caesarea in honor of Caesar and added Philippi [his own name] to it. This city was dominated by paganism. The questions of Jesus, when seen in the light of this city's background, helps one to see its significance.
- b. Jesus' first question related to what the general public thought of him. The disciples gave the different views the public had of him. The public did not understand his true identity.
- c. Jesus' second question was more direct and specific. Peter, the chief spokesman for the 12 answers rightly that Jesus is the Christ [i.e. the Anointed One and the promised Messiah]. Matthew in the parallel account gives additional details of this account.

Matthew 16:16-20 “<sup>16</sup> Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” <sup>17</sup> Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. <sup>18</sup> And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. <sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” <sup>20</sup> Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.”

In a city full of idol worship, Peter confesses that Jesus is not only the Christ, but also “*the Son of the living God*” in contrast to the dead idols of that land.

- d. Jesus did not want his identity to be publicized before the completion of his ministry. That he is the Messiah would cause people to misunderstand his real mission, i.e. going to the cross.

## **Application**

### **1. A Right View of Christ is Critical for a Right Relationship with Him.**

While the crowds had their own opinions about Jesus [all of which were wrong], Jesus by his direct question to the disciples “*Who do you say that I am?*” stresses the absolute need for every individual to have a right understanding about him. While the tendency in today’s environment is to see Jesus as a good moral teacher, merely a prophet, etc., it is important for everyone to have the right understanding of him – he is Christ the Lord and only Savior of all mankind [and to act upon it].

Peter not only confessed, but also acted upon his confession [as would be seen by his later actions]. Judas also joined in the confession, but his later actions would show that it was mere lip confession, without true heart conversion.

## **For Reflection**

- Who is Jesus to me? If he is the Lord of my life, does my life show proof of his lordship?

## Part 2: Jesus, the Suffering Servant of God [8:31-16:20]

### V. Final Journey to Jerusalem [8:31-10:52]

#### 1. First Prediction of Christ's Death and Resurrection [8:31-33]

<sup>31</sup> He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup> He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup> But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

- a. While the crowd had expectations that the Messiah would bring the earthly kingdom immediately, the disciples were not very different from that line of thinking either. That is why Jesus immediately after confirming his real identity goes on to describe the nature of his mission.
- b. Notice the repetition of the word "must" indicating the absolute necessity of the cross "*must suffer...must be killed.*" Why? "*Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness*" [Heb 9:22], "*it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life*" [Lev 17:11]. Therefore, the death of Christ was an absolute requirement for the forgiveness of sins.
- c. While the disciples understood this teaching [*"He spoke plainly about this"*], they were not willing to accept it as seen by the reaction of Peter who goes to the extent of rebuking [literally admonishing] Jesus. Jesus realizing that this was yet another attempt of stopping him from the cross addresses the real source behind such thinking – Satan. Satan had earlier tried to tempt Jesus in the wilderness [1:14-15] and now through one of the key apostles was tempting Jesus. Peter was not demon-possessed, but was speaking in such a foolish way as if he was the devil's representative. Peter's thoughts were carnal [i.e. fleshly] and opposite to that of God "*You do not have in mind the things of God, but things of men.*"

#### 2. Cost of Discipleship [8:34-38]

<sup>34</sup> Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. <sup>36</sup> What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? <sup>37</sup> Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? <sup>38</sup> If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

- a. Jesus goes on to describe the true cost of discipleship – What it means to be a true Christian. Some have wrongly concluded that this passage applies only to first level Christians that are called to be second level Christians. They generally are known by the teaching that all one needs to do in order to be saved is accept Christ as Savior and then at a later time, if they choose to, make Jesus as Lord. According to this teaching, one can go to heaven by taking Christ as Savior alone without submitting to him as Lord. They usually define repentance [if at all they include repentance in their gospel call] as simply a change of mind [about who Christ is and who we are], but not a change of heart.

To put it in simple terms, the bible nowhere makes this sort of distinctions [i.e. first level Christian is a believer, second level Christian is a disciple, etc]. Christ cannot be divided. He is both Savior and Lord [Acts 2:36]. One cannot take him in bits and pieces. In addition, Acts 11:26 clearly tells us that "*disciples were called Christians*" thus indicating that there are no Level 1/Level 2 Christians.

This passage teaches very clearly that this message is for all people. Verse 34 indicates that Jesus “called the crowd to him along with the disciples.” Verse 36 talks about losing one’s soul. If this passage applies to first level Christians, is Jesus teaching that a Christian can lose his soul? That contradicts other passages such as John 10:28-30, Romans 8:31-39 that speak of the eternal security of the believer.

- b. The call is for all people that want to be saved “*If anyone would come after me.*” Jesus gives the details of how one can get saved.

First, one must be willing to “*deny himself,*” i.e. saying “No” to his own way of thinking and living. This means saying “No” to selfish interests, selfish pleasures, earthly securities, etc.

Second, one must be willing to “*take up his cross,*” i.e. be willing to come under Christ’s rule and if needed even to die for him as a result of coming under his authority.

Third, one must be willing to “*follow*” him for the rest of his life. It is not a one-time commitment, but a life-long commitment to follow him.

Jesus goes on to contrast the uselessness of hypothetically gaining the “*whole world*” [i.e. getting all that one wants including the whole world] and yet losing one’s “*soul*” for all eternity.

## Application

### 1. Christ calls for a Total Surrender.

Christ’s clear teaching on following him was not well accepted by many during his earthly ministry [John 6:60-66] and is not well accepted even today. However, these are the terms that Jesus himself sets for those that desire to experience the salvation he offers.

Simply stated, if one is ashamed of his sins to the point of fleeing to Christ for mercy, Christ will not be ashamed of him in the future. This type of an individual will show proof of such beliefs by a life that lives under the lordship of Christ.

However, if one is not ashamed of his sins, he will not be willing to enter through the narrow gate nor be willing to walk the narrow road, but will live a life that focuses on fulfilling all earthly desires. These are the type of people even if they claim to be Christians will hear Christ say one day “*Away from me, you evildoers!*” [Matthew 7:23]. Remember these were people that would stand before him and say “*Lord, Lord*” [Matt 7:21-22].

It is good to remember that none can live a perfect life after becoming a Christian. However, what marks the first group from the second group is that the person in the first group will be marked by these characteristics: increasing love for God, increasing hatred and turning from sins, increasing love for others, seeking things of God and not worldly things, desiring to fellowship with God’s people, desiring to spend more time with the Lord in reading the Word and prayer, etc. In other words, it is not perfection that marks such an individual, but an **increasing pattern towards holiness** that marks such an individual.

## 2. Christians are to be faithful in Proclaiming the Whole Gospel

This gospel message is not a popular message, but we dare not tamper with it by using our own wisdom. Many think that if they give an easy message, more people will be saved. This type of thinking is not God-centered, but man-centered. A Christian cannot give a half-gospel and say “This is what the Lord says.”

Perhaps the following points will assist in our proclamation of the whole gospel:

1. **Salvation is of the Lord** [Jon 2:9; Eph 2:8]. Remember God is the One who saves people and he saves people when they hear his word preached.
2. **Half-Gospel is a False Gospel.** Remember half-truth is a lie and Satan is the father of lies [John 8:44]. Paul clearly states that anything other than the truth is a false gospel “<sup>6</sup> *I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—* <sup>7</sup> *which is really **no gospel at all**. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.* <sup>8</sup> *But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!* <sup>9</sup> *As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!”* [Gal 1:6-9].
3. **Messengers are the Carriers, not Creators of the Message.** Christians are the messengers that are entrusted with a clear message [Lk 24:47; Acts 1:8]. What God requires from us is our obedience in conveying this truth [in love] to all people. Imagine if a postman instead of giving the mail that someone has sent to us, opens it and sees something that might affect our emotions, changes the contents and scribbles his own notes to us! Or if a doctor upon diagnosing our medical condition refrains from telling us the truth for fear of offending us. Would we like it? Yet, when it comes to the eternal condition of the soul of one individual, many professing Christians fail to proclaim the full message. This should not be the case. We must remember what God requires from us is total faithfulness to his revealed word, this includes the full proclamation of the message as he has given it to us.

### For Reflection

- Does my life truly show that I am a changed person?
- Is my life truly God-centered or centered on getting all my desires met?
- Am I fooling myself [and others] with an outward form of Christianity?

## Quiz 9

**1. The Bible prohibits Christians from seeking signs and wonders to increase their faith.**

True      False

**2. Which of the statements is more accurate?**

- a. False teachers have no biblical truth in their teachings.
- b. False teachers, at times, have a little biblical truth in their teachings.

**3. Failure to trust God for today's needs is as sinful as failure to trust him for tomorrow's [or next year's] needs.**

True      False

**4. Christian/Believer/Disciple are all interchangeable terms denoting the same thing.**

True      False

**5. If one does not preach the full gospel of repentance and belief, he can still be called a true preacher of the gospel.**

True      False

**6. If one does preach the full gospel of repentance and belief, but omits other teachings that may be offensive to the public can still be called a true preacher of the gospel.**

True      False