

November 2

Mark 7 &8

Matthew 15 & 16

In today's reading, Jesus does a new tour. If he were a rock band, he would be pioneering a new country... like the Beatles invaded America. Today, we read about him in Tyre and Sidon – cities that are North of Israel AND the Decapolis – East of Israel.

This is very important, because Jesus is training his disciples. First, this foreigner/Canaanite woman in Tyre shows amazing faith and verbal dexterity in asking Jesus for a miracle. Don't read this story wrong – Jesus WANTS to give the miracle in the non-Jewish territory. But remember, he is training the disciples. He is helping them get past their racial biases to see that the miracles, healing and the kingdom of God is available to Gentiles as much as Jews. Those who used to be the enemies of God's people are going to become the prize that is to be won by the gospel. With the 'dog' story of the Canaanite woman Jesus is exposing the bias of the disciples and blowing it out of the water.

He makes the deaf hear and the mute speak. Even in Sidon. And the disciples are amazed and nobody can stop talking about it.

Then he moves to the area called the Decapolis. Have you ever had déjà-vu? I'll bet when you read this passage, you thought – this is awful similar to yesterday's reading. It is, with some important detail differences. The feeding of the 4000 was no more than six or eight weeks after the feeding of the 5000 that had occurred on the other side of the lake. When it came time to produce the miracle, Jesus said, "I have compassion on these people because they have already been with me for three days and have had nothing to eat." The disciples' reaction is, "Where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?" Nobody said – "Hey, how about that bread thing? It worked on the other side a few weeks ago! It might be that they were daft, but I think it much more likely that they were biased. You see, the Decapolis is an ALL Gentile audience. God wouldn't be likely to do a miracle for THEM, just like he did for the JEWS?

The fact that He does reproduce that beautiful 'feeding of the masses' is certainly an indication that Jesus Christ is the "Bread of life," not the Bread of the Jews, or only the Bread of the Gentiles, but the Bread of both the Jews and the Gentiles,

the Bread of LIFE. His Gospel is for all men. So follow this... Jesus is simultaneously providing food for people AND teaching about himself as the bread of life AND teaching his disciples against racism and for a new covenant that covers ALL people. A lot happening in this text.

Did you notice that right after that the Pharisees came and asked Jesus for a sign from heaven? SERIOUSLY? Can you imagine seeing Jesus perform the miracle they had seen and still not believing they had seen an adequate demonstration of His power?

Jesus refused to give the sign-seekers yet another miracle. The reason for that is certainly because the issue had nothing to do with a lack of evidence. It was not a matter of intellect, it wasn't a matter of evidence, it was a matter of the will. We need to understand that nothing has really changed. Most of the people who "resist" the testimony of the gospel under the rubric of needing more "proof" do not in fact need what they ask for. They already have plenty of proof. The real problem is a heart that is implacably set against the truth. Jesus told them the only sign they would get was the sign of Jonah.

Now most people believe and quite naturally that the sign of Jonah was that after he had been "dead," as it were, in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights that he was expelled back into the land of the living. Jesus would then be saying you're not getting a sign now, but watch! After I am dead for three days I'll come back to life. Then perhaps, you will have enough "evidence" to believe. And on the strength of that sign and no other Nineveh repented! Jesus may then have been saying: I am all the sign you are going to get. Observe me, listen to my message -- decide. I am all the proof you need!

Jesus has two more lessons for the disciples, though. Notice that he quizzes them about the number of baskets full of bread left over. For the feeding of the 5000, the Jews, it was 12 baskets – reminding them of the 12 tribes and twelve disciples... very Jewish. For the feeding of the Gentile 4,000 it was seven baskets, the number of completion. Jesus is saying through this symbol that the bread of life is enough for the Jews with plenty left over to complete the work in Gentile neighborhoods... 12 = Jew, 7= everybody.

OK, the last miracle in this passage is brilliantly packaged by Mark with this series. It is the halfway part of the book of Mark and a two stage miracle. After the first healing, the man could partially see. After the second, he could fully see.

Jesus was not unable to heal this man. He was utilizing this healing as a parable to the disciples. "You are partway there, you can spiritually see... but only kind

of. Men look like trees. But stick with me all the way and I will make you see spiritually as clear as day."

They turn the corner from the Decapolis and Jesus begins to prepare them for their final time with him – enjoy reading about that tomorrow!