



**WESTLAKE HILLS**  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

**“Connecting the Dots”**  
**Sermon Series: “The Way of Jesus”**

Mark 8:1-21

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**Mark 8:1-21 (NIV)**

***Jesus Feeds the Four Thousand***

<sup>1</sup>During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, <sup>2</sup>“I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. <sup>3</sup>If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance.”

<sup>4</sup>His disciples answered, “But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?”

<sup>5</sup>“How many loaves do you have?” Jesus asked.

“Seven,” they replied.

<sup>6</sup>He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. When he had taken the seven loaves and given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people, and they did so.

<sup>7</sup>They had a few small fish as well; he gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them. <sup>8</sup>The people ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. <sup>9</sup>About four thousand men were present. And having sent them away, <sup>10</sup>he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha.

<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.

***The Yeast of the Pharisees and Herod***

<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.”

<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?”

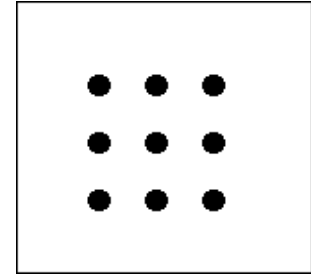
They answered, “Seven.”

<sup>21</sup>He said to them, “Do you still not understand?”



## **Introduction.**

Here is a diagram of 9 dots. Can you connect the dots with four straight lines without lifting your pencil? Hint – you have to think outside the box in order to do it.



Later on in the sermon, I'll show you how you can do it.

That's a fun exercise, but I want to make a spiritual point in this. Sometimes you and I miss the obvious in the Christian life, and we fail to connect the dots in following Jesus. However, we're not the first to do this. The disciples of Christ had the same problem, and we read about an instance when the disciples forgot spiritual truths and the reality of God's faithfulness, and they couldn't connect the dots. Let's take a look at the story.

## **I. A Repeat Performance.**

As Jesus continued His ministry in an area called the Decapolis on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, a large crowd gathered and listened to Him teach over a period of 3 days. It may have been the first example of a weekend retreat recorded in the Bible (sort of like being down at Mo Ranch for the All Church Retreat – there is still time to register!). The text tells us Jesus had compassion on the people, and He wanted to give them something to eat before He sent them away. He was concerned about their ability to make the journey home on empty stomachs.

The disciples, however, were more concerned with the problem of finding enough food for a large crowd, especially in such a remote place. As He had done before in chapter 6 in the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus asked the disciples to take inventory. "How many loaves do you have?" He asked. "Seven," was the reply, along with a few small fish. Then the Lord proceeded to feed the multitude as He had done before when they were in Galilee. Jesus' provision was sufficient, and the people ate till they were satisfied. Seven basketsful of fragments were left over and collected by the disciples, and 4,000 people were fed that day, not counting the women and the children.

This story is so similar to the one in chapter 6 when Jesus fed the people before that it makes you wonder why the disciples had forgotten so quickly the ability of our Lord to provide in miraculous ways. However, before we are quick to condemn the disciples, we have to admit on occasion we have the same problem, too. We can be such slow learners when it comes to spiritual matters, and we don't seem to get it the first time around. God has to teach us lessons in the Christian life over and over again with a repeat performance.

In the feeding of the 4,000, the same miracle was performed as before, but this time it is with a new audience. You will recall that the people of the Decapolis had previously urged Jesus to leave them after the deliverance of the Geresene demoniac and the destruction of the 2,000 pigs. But here they came out for a conference!

What could explain such a radical turn about in their attitude? People who had previously rejected Christ now came out in droves to hear Him. Why? I think it's because one person made a difference. You will remember after he was delivered the demoniac begged Jesus for the opportunity to go with the Lord, but Christ instructed him to go home to his family and tell them how much the Lord had done for him and how God had mercy on him. Mark tells us in chapter 5 that the man went throughout the Decapolis and told all that Jesus had done for him, and the people were amazed.

People come to Christ simply because of the story or another person. They hear what Christ has done for them, they see the difference He has made, and they want to know more. It may be that this crowd in the Decapolis was there because they had heard this former demoniac telling of what Jesus had done for him and the difference Christ had made. One person can make a difference.



## II. A Subtle Temptation.

The Pharisees came out and began to question Jesus, and they demanded that He give them a sign from heaven to prove He was the Messiah. The tendency of the age in which our Lord lived was to look for God in the supernatural. It was believed when the Messiah came, the most startling things would happen – and they did. But the request of the Pharisees was not sincere. It was meant to test Jesus. They wanted more proof than the miracles; they wanted a sign, an outward compelling proof of His divine authority.

But Jesus told them no sign would be given because of their unbelief, and the text adds that Christ sighed deeply in His response. The word that is used here is *anastenazo*, and it is found only here in the whole NT. It represents almost exasperation, and it describes the grief and disappointment of Jesus when faced with the unbelief of those who, because of their spiritual privilege, should have been more responsive. There is a note of impatience in Jesus' question, "Why does this generation ask for a miraculous sign?"

Unfortunately, things haven't changed all that much. We still want an extraordinary experience or feeling when we go to worship. We look for God to do the spectacular and make it clear and evident before we'll believe Him. All too often we are just like the Pharisees and the people who lived at the time of Jesus; we ask for a sign from God, too. "Show me," we say. "Prove it to me before I put my trust in You." We prefer to walk by sight rather than by faith. How might God be exasperated with us because of the ways we demand a sign from Him today?

I remember as a young Christian having a keen interest in hearing about how couples fell in love and got married. I would ask, "How did you know that she was the one you were to marry." Most often, the reply I received from my married Christian friends was, "You'll just know!"

Later on, when Lorie and I were dating and getting pretty serious, I was trying to figure out if she was the One. Everyone told me that I would just know, but I didn't just know! I was perplexed and confused, and I remember wishing God would simply do some skywriting and spell it out for me - "Lorie is the One. Marry her, you big dummy!" But that didn't happen; it wasn't crystal clear.

Just before Lorie was about to give me the "play me or trade me" speech because I was dragging my feet, God reminded me of a truth from Scripture. The Bible says, "*The righteous shall live by faith,*" and "*Without faith, it is impossible to please Him.*" As I thought about the matter, it became clear that if faith was required in my decision to follow Christ in the beginning, and if faith was required as I sought to follow the Lord day by day, how much more so should faith be required in this most important decision of marriage. It was an exercise of reasonable faith, to be sure. Some people thought I was crazy for not seeing it all along! But it was a big step of faith nonetheless for me. To some people God does give clear signs in a supernatural way, and occasionally I've had those dramatic revelations, too, but He didn't give me one on this occasion. I had to step out in faith and trust. Maybe that's what God is asking you to do today.

Stephen Curtis Chapman is a contemporary Christian artist who wrote a song about these things. The words of the chorus go like this:

*You're waiting for lightening,  
A sign that it's time for a change.  
You're listening for thunder,  
While He quietly whispers your name.*

*But the sign and the Word have already been given,  
And now it's by faith we must look and we must listen.*<sup>i</sup>

The fact of the matter is that ultimately the most important sign from heaven God has given us is the sign of the cross, when Jesus died the sinner's death and paid the penalty for our sin. That is the



sign which proves to us His love and His authority to forgive sin, and it is the sign from heaven to speak into our doubts and questions.

### **III. A Short Memory.**

Jesus left the Pharisees and the crowd, and He and His disciples crossed over to the northern side of the Sea of Galilee. For some reason the disciples forgot to bring an adequate supply of bread with them for the trip. Their oversight set the stage for Jesus' teaching.

Our Lord warned them about the leaven or yeast of the Pharisees. Leaven was a Jewish symbol for evil. It was a piece of dough that was kept over from a previous baking which had fermented, and to the Jew fermentation was identified with putrefaction, and therefore leaven was a symbol for evil in their minds. There is even a smell to yeast when it is doing its thing.

In this Jesus explained there is a permeating power in evil. It begins small with a subtle temptation, a small sin, and it grows and grows and grows. The apostle Paul warned the Ephesians believers, "*Do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil a foothold*" (4:26,27). How many broken marriages headed down the wrong path to divorce because the husband or wife did not heed this warning? The word that is translated "foothold" literally means "a place to stand." Don't give Satan a place to stand in your life; don't give him a foothold.

In what ways do we give Satan a place to stand in our lives? What are the subtle ways we allow him to gain a foothold in our hearts? We've been studying Dallas Willard's *Renovation of the Heart* in the pastor's class at Midweek Moment this winter. Last week we looked at the chapter that had to do with the transformation of the will, and in the video Dallas explained the way in which sin occurs in the human heart and he dissected sin to help us see the progress.

First it starts with a thought. But it is not sin to simply have the thought. Then the thought is followed with inclination or desire, which, together with the thought, produces temptation. But even this is not sin. We are told in Scripture Jesus Himself was tempted in the wilderness; he had the thought and the inclination, but He did not sin. There is the thought, then the inclination or desire, and then there is consent, where we give ourselves to it, and that is when we sin. It is when we consent with our will and make a choice in our heart that sin enters in. Dallas said, "The thief is not only the person who steals but also the person who would steal if he had the opportunity. They have consented to do it in their heart." That is giving Satan a foothold, a place to stand, in your heart.

Jesus' teaching about the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod passed completely over the heads of the disciples. They thought He was chastising them for not bringing enough bread for the trip. The Lord saw their preoccupation with the bread, and He reminded them that twice He satisfied the hunger of huge crowds with food enough to spare. It was as if Jesus was saying, "Why all the worry? Don't you remember what happened before? Haven't you got a clue yet? Hasn't experience taught you that if you are with Me, you don't have to worry about things like that? Can't you connect the dots?"

The disciples should have remembered the Lord's abundant provision, but the problem was they had a very short memory and they had forgotten Christ's faithfulness. They saw only the immediate problem, and they failed to see things from a heavenly perspective.

As Christians we need to take the long view in the course of our daily lives. We are to be people who remember and recall God's faithfulness to us. As we face difficulties and encounter problems, we should look back at the way in which God has brought us through before and see things from a spiritual perspective and not just a material one.

Grief may have come upon us, and God was there to comfort. Temptation mounted, and somehow we didn't succumb. A problem seemed to us unsolvable at home or at work, but remarkably it worked out. We reached the breaking point and we didn't think we could make it another day, but the Lord's



hand was there. Our teenager was angry and rebellious, but he came back around and we are so proud of him now as a young adult. We were out of bread before, and the Lord provided all we needed.

The call is to connect the dots and recount the ways God has been faithful in the past whenever we encounter struggles in the present. Maintain clear vision and take a long view of God's faithfulness in your life, and that will make a difference for today.

### **Conclusion/Application.**

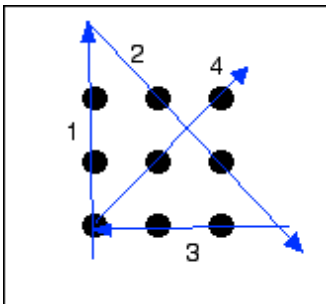
As we close this morning, let me ask you some questions by way of application.

**1. In what ways are you demanding a sign from God?** How are you asking Him to prove Himself before you will trust Him? The bible tells us that Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. How are you demanding a sign from God today?

**2. Where do you need to walk more by faith?** In what areas is the Lord calling you to trust in Him? You may not completely understand, you may not have all the details, but He is calling you to have faith in Him nonetheless? Where do you need to walk by faith more today.

**3. Where is Satan seeking to gain a foothold in your life?** In what area of life are you battling temptation? Where is the evil one trying to get a foot in the door with you? Resist him. Get some help. Run to Jesus, and cling to the cross. Christ is the only One who can help you overcome.

Earlier in the sermon I told you I'd show you how to connect the dots in four straight lines without lifting your pencil. Here's how you do it. (**dots with lines**)



Pretty cool, isn't it? Let's connect the dots with Christ spiritually today.

I close with this. An older couple had dinner at another couple's house one night, and after eating the wives left the table and went into the kitchen. The two older gentlemen were talking, and one said to the other, "Last night we went out to a new restaurant, and it was really great. I would recommend it very highly."

The other man said, "What's the name of the restaurant?"

The first man knitted his brow in obvious concentration, and finally said to his companion, "Aahh, What is the name of that red flower you give to someone you love?"

His friend replied, "A Carnation??"

"No. No. The other one" the man said.

His friend offered another suggestion, "The Poppy?"

"Nahhhh, growls the man. You know the one that is red and has thorns."

His friend said, "Do you mean a rose?"

"Yes, Yes that's it. Thank you!" the first man said. He then turned toward the kitchen and yelled, "Rose, what's the name of that restaurant we went to last night?"

*God's gift of memory is a precious one. Let us purpose in our hearts to recall the faithfulness of the Lord in the past as we look to the future and seek to be faithful to Him in the present. Let's remember to connect the dots and recall the faithfulness of our Lord today and always. Amen.*

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<sup>i</sup>Steven Curtis Chapman and Tony Elenburg, *Waiting For Lightening*, 1989.

