



## **The LESSONS of MIRACLES**

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Jesus Christ was a miracle worker!

However, He was never casual about working miracles. He was strategic.

He never worked miracles for show. He always had a greater purpose than the miracle itself—an illustrative lesson about life in the Kingdom of God.

The miracles that Jesus did expressed God's compassion, generosity, and divine authority.

Today, we're going to think about the lessons of miracles, and see what lessons we can learn from Jesus for living in our day.

### **Setting the Scene**

I want to set the scene geographically with a map of the Holy Land in the time of Jesus' ministry. Before we come to our text in Mark 8, Jesus and His disciples took a road trip for a week or more.

They left Galilee to go west and north into Gentile territory, walking to the coastal town of Tyre on the Mediterranean Sea. Then, following the coast they traveled north to Sidon.

From there, they turned inland to the area east of the Jordan River, known as the Decapolis (Ten Towns; a region settled by the Greeks in ten major towns).

Between Caesarea Philippi and Hippos, on their way back to the Sea of Galilee, Jesus attracted a large crowd of Gentile seekers. For three days, He taught them about the Kingdom of God.

In the afternoon of the third day, as Jesus concluded His teaching...

Mark 8:1-5 NLT

*Jesus called His disciples and told them, "I feel sorry for these people. They have been here with Me for three days, and they have nothing left to eat. If I send them home hungry, they will faint along the way. For some of them have come a long distance."*

*His disciples replied, “How are we supposed to find enough food to feed them out here in the wilderness?”*

*Jesus asked, “How much bread do you have?”*

*“Seven loaves,” they replied.*

They also found a few small fish, but it was sizable crowd—there were 4,000 men, plus women and children.

Jesus took what the disciples gave Him and thanked God for it and broke it and gave it to His disciples to distribute to the crowd. When everyone had eaten, they picked up 7 large baskets of leftovers!

Then, Jesus and His disciples got in a boat and crossed the Sea of Galilee to the western shore. There He encountered some Pharisees, who demanded that He prove His authority by performing a miraculous sign. He would have none of that, so they got back in the boat and crossed the lake again to the east side. Here’s what happened next:

Mark 8:15-16 NLT

*As they were crossing the lake, Jesus warned them, “Watch out! Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod.” At this they began to argue with each other because they hadn’t brought any bread.*

Jesus warned about “yeast.” The disciples argued about having “no bread.” Isn’t that a strange conversation?

Jesus *spoke* in figurative language, but the disciples *heard* concrete language.

Jesus used “yeast” as a metaphor, but the disciples thought He was talking about actual bread to eat.

With respect to this conversation, what was it that the disciples were really lacking? Evidently, they lacked knowledge, understanding, trust, vision, and the ability to hear the language that Jesus used.

## **The Lesson**

Now, here comes the lesson from Jesus...

Mark 8:17-21 NLT

*Jesus knew what they were saying, so He said, “Why are you arguing about having no bread? Don’t you know or understand even yet? Are your hearts too hard to take it in? ‘You have eyes—can’t you see? You have ears—can’t you hear?’ Don’t you remember anything at all?”*

*When I fed the 5,000 with five loaves of bread, how many baskets of leftovers did you pick up afterward?"*

*"Twelve," they said.*

*"And when I fed the 4,000 with seven loaves, how many large baskets of leftovers did you pick up?"*

*"Seven," they said.*

*"Don't you understand yet?" He asked them.*

Jesus recounted the incongruities of the actual events: 5 loaves → 12 baskets; 7 loaves → 7 baskets. Then He asked, "Don't you get it yet?"

Jesus used concrete terms (and actions) to convey spiritual realities; that was His plane of communication.

Think about it... In the previous chapter, a Gentile woman from Syrian-Phoenicia asked for deliverance for her little daughter, and Jesus responded with, *"It isn't right to take food from the children and throw it to the dogs."* WHAT?!?

In another place, He also said, *"If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off."* And, *"If your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out."* WHAT?!?

Jesus spoke of deep spiritual truths in symbols and parables, using homely, everyday object lessons.

He used concrete terms (and actions) to convey spiritual realities; that was His plane of communication.

The disciples, on the other hand, used concrete terms only for material realities; that was their plane of thinking and communication. (Now there's nothing intrinsically wrong with that, but it is inadequate (too limited) for conversation about spiritual realities. They needed, as do we, to learn a new use of language.)

Without question, two remarkable miracles had taken place.

First, on the west side of the lake, with a large crowd of Jewish seekers (5,000 men, plus women and children) He used 5 loaves of bread to feed them all and they picked up 12 baskets of leftovers!

Then, on the east side of the lake, with a large crowd of Gentile seekers (4,000 men, plus women and children) He fed the crowd with just 7 loaves and they picked up 7 baskets of leftovers!

What is your takeaway from those events? What was Jesus trying to convey?

To the crowds, what was the multiplication of loaves and fishes supposed to indicate?

To His disciples, what further lesson did Jesus hope to convey through those miracles?

If you and I hope to hear God's voice in our lives and be guided by the Holy Spirit, we must learn to recognize the Bible's figurative (symbolic) language, and to draw from those words their *symbolic essence*—the principle that may be applied to the concrete experience of our daily lives in a variety of circumstances.

This doesn't mean seeing "a demon behind every bush," or imagining that *every* word has symbolic meaning, but when terms are clearly used as symbols we need to recognize it and pause to think long and hard about their spiritual meaning and application. And NOT mistake them for material realities.

The opposite is also true, and worthy of your careful consideration: When the Bible plainly uses concrete terms, referring to real world events, don't spiritualize them! Don't try to squeeze a spiritual implication from every verse.

The Bible is NOT a collection of spiritual analogies—it contains real history and narrative, plus poetry and prophecy. Poetic and prophetic literature contain many spiritual symbols (figures of speech); but typically, narrative and history do not.

If this seems confusing, you're not alone. EVERYONE has stumbled along this path of proper Bible interpretation.

In the very next chapter, after receiving this reproof of instruction about understanding His metaphors, when Jesus said to His disciples, "*The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of His enemies. He will be killed, but three days later He will rise from the dead,*" they didn't understand what He was saying. No wonder!

I imagine they wondered to themselves, "Is He using metaphors now? If so, I don't get it. But He can't really mean it. He can't be killed!" And after the argument and reproof in the boat, they were afraid to ask Him what He meant.

So, how do we develop better recognition of the Bible's figurative language and its meaning?

Do two things: (1) Re-read the Scriptures. A superficial reading is not sufficient to really understand what God has to say. (2) Think about what you've read, prayerfully, so the Holy Spirit may illuminate your thoughts. If you do these two things regularly, you will grow familiar with

the Bible's imagery over time and develop a good grasp of Jesus' teachings with deep understanding. Don't give up. He has so much He wants to share with you!

And if you ever want help with understanding a passage, just ask one of the pastors. We would love to serve you in this way. We may not have the answer you're searching for, but we can certainly help you learn how to think about it.

So, Jesus' miracles themselves always had a dual purpose: (1) to help someone in a desperate need, and (2) to convey understanding about the Kingdom of God and its King.

Also, Jesus often communicated spiritual truths using metaphors (figurative language). The words themselves may have a concrete definition, but He is not using them that way—He is using them to illustrate a spiritual reality.

When you encounter this, don't be confused by the superficial meaning of the words—look *behind* the words to see the principle He is describing. Then you can apply that principle to your own circumstances.

## **The Application**

Finally, let's think together about a really important application of these lessons...

It would be quite natural, as you become accustomed to thinking in principles, instead of just materials, that your own language will change. You will begin to use Biblical metaphors to express spiritual truths, just like the writers of the Scriptures did.

But then you may encounter seekers or young believers who aren't familiar with that use of the terms. To speak to them in Biblical metaphors would confuse them, like Jesus' language confused the disciples.

Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth (1 Corinthians 2) to remind them, *"When I first came to you, dear brothers and sisters, I didn't use lofty words and impressive wisdom to tell you God's secret plan."* Instead, he used plain speech. That's appropriate when speaking with those who are unacquainted with the Bible.

Paul went on to explain, *"Yet when I am among mature believers, I do speak with words of wisdom, but not the kind of wisdom that belongs to this world."*

When you are speaking about the things of God with other believers, who are familiar with the Scriptures, you can use Bible language and they will know what you're talking about.

Paul was very clear: *“When we tell you these things, we do not use words that come from human wisdom. Instead, we speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit’s words to explain spiritual truths. But people who aren’t spiritual can’t receive these truths from God’s Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can’t understand it, for only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means.”*

We call this, speaking in “Christianese.” Among the Biblically literate this is not a problem. But if we hope to communicate God’s words to others, especially those who are unchurched and unfamiliar with the Bible, we must learn to translate spiritual realities into concrete, if symbolic, terms, as Jesus did, and explain their meaning as much as necessary.

Therefore, beware of speaking in “Christianese.” Know your audience.

Sometimes, Christianese may be a sign of pride—that you know things others don’t, that you belong to the in-crowd. Beware of that!

Use your words to *open* the eyes of the blind (not to leave them groping in confusion)!

When you speak of the things of God, don’t be cryptic, be clear. If you can describe it in everyday language, do so. Although it requires more advance thought on your part, do the necessary work for the sake of others. Think before you speak.

I hope we have learned two things today:

- (1) Jesus used miracles as object lessons of spiritual truths, and often His words had symbolic meaning, so we must think carefully about their application, and
- (2) We need to be careful about our use of Biblical expressions, that they can be clearly understood by those we’re speaking with.

What Christianese have you heard commonly used and commonly misunderstood?

What would be a better way to say those things?