

**Title:** The Book of Mark: Part 21, Softening Our Hearts Towards Jesus  
**Speaker:** Neil Chotai  
**Passage:** Mark 8:1-21  
**Big idea:** 3 Ways to Soften Our Hearts towards Jesus in times of need.



We are continuing our series in the book of Mark. If you have your bibles, please turn to Mark 8:1-21.

When we first look at this passage, it may remind us of the movie *Groundhog Day*. That sensation of “I’ve seen this before” or a sense of “déjà vu”. As we approach the mid-way point of the book of Mark, we have already had one scene of Jesus feeding a crowd, the Feeding of the 5,000, but now we will see a similar miracle, the feeding of the 4,000.

In this biblical account there are three groups of people found in the passage, along with Jesus. And as we look at these three groups, I want to study their hearts towards Jesus.

<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 distribute to 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 were present. After he had 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 sign? Truly I tell you, 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.

<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?”

#### Mark 8:1-21

There are times in our life when our hearts are not that pliable or soft towards God. This can be because of something we thought should come to pass but does not, or vice versa. In life, things happen and when they go against us we need to reflect on how we react when it comes to our relationship with Jesus. There are times when we need to look within ourselves and see what our heart is like towards God. Are our hearts hard against God or are they soft towards Him?

# **BIG IDEA**

## 3 Ways to **Soften Our Hearts** towards **Jesus**.



Let's dive into the passage.

Jesus is in the Decapolis region. We are seeing in Jesus's ministry that he has left the predominantly Jewish area of Galilee and is now venturing into the predominately Gentile territory. For the disciples this would be very difficult because majority of their lives have been spent in the predominantly Jewish area where they grew up. Jews and Gentiles did not really mix, and if they did it was not a good thing. Worse, the oppression that is on the people of Israel at this time is from the Gentiles known as the Roman Empire.

Here we have Jesus going into the Decapolis a Gentile area and he is ministering to all people and showing them the love of God. The redemption story which began in Genesis is not just for the Jewish people, but it is for ALL people, for all nations, for all language groups, for all colours, and for all backgrounds. The word has gone out about Jesus, and he becomes famous in this area.

Now put yourself in the shoes of the people in the Decapolis and you have heard that this person who had great things to say and performed miracles was coming to your area. You live in a desolate place, there is only about 10 major towns in the area. I want you to put yourself in that place right now, you have a need that has to be fulfilled and nothing in life is fulfilling that need. What do you do? You cannot count on government support. You cannot count on family; they are in the same situation as you. Everyone out there is for themselves, there is no one that really cares. And all of a sudden, someone comes to your region, and he does some amazing things. You think 'Let's go and see him.' There is a spark of hope in your life. This could make the difference; this man could make a difference in your existence. More people hear about it, and you are joined by a huge crowd of people. It begins with a few, grows larger to hundreds and then more and more and now into the thousands. The crowds of people that have unmet needs are so desperate to see this person named Jesus. It is this situation that the people are in.

Mark 8. 1, "During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him"

The people would have come from far away places. They would only have so much provision because they would not have a lot with them. The Bible says that they were there for three days listening to Jesus. Provision is running out, they have a need for food. The basic need in life is food that they do not have it.

They may have been thinking "we're hearing this guy, it is good, but nobody cares about our basic need for food." Their hearts are hardening at that fact.

Now we may not be in a situation exactly like that in which we do not have any food or sustenance, but we may feel that our needs are not being fulfilled. We may think that no one cares about us and wonder if God is there. Our hearts begin to harden. But that is when we need to focus our hearts on Jesus.

The first way to soften our hearts to Jesus is to:



There are times when we are in need and don't see anything really happening, that we think God doesn't care, but he cares deeply about us.

Mark 8.2-3, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance."

Jesus sees their need and he shows great compassion over the crowd just as he shows compassion over us when we are in our time of need. It has been three days that these people had been with Jesus, hearing about him, and now they have nothing to eat. They have come from a long way and if they go home, they could collapse. Something needs to be done. The disciples respond to Jesus' comment:

Mark 8.4, "His disciples answered, 'But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?'"

Every time we read this passage of scripture, we must remember that this is the second miraculous feeding of a multitude of people. I have to laugh at the disciples' question here. Really, were they not the ones that were present before, when Jesus fed the other multitude. Do they think Jesus will do nothing? The disciples may have thought that because this group are Gentiles and not Jewish. Why would Jesus do anything for the Gentiles? But Jesus does something similar for the Gentiles as he did for Jews.

Mark 8.5-6, "How many loaves do you have?" Jesus asked. 'Seven,' they replied. 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 distribute to the people, and they did so."

He uses the disciples in the work of the ministry because they need to get used to not just blessing those who are Jewish but the Gentiles as well.

Then Jesus does something similar with the fish, it is believed that these could actually be sardines.

Mark 8.7-8, "They had a few small fish as well; he gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them. The people ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over."

Jesus not only met their needs, but they were satisfied with leftover food. When it says there were seven baskets picked up, we should not picture little baskets, these were large baskets.

Mark 8.9, "About four thousand were present. After he had sent them away,"

The Bible states that there was 4,000 men, including women and children, but again the audience is predominantly Gentiles.

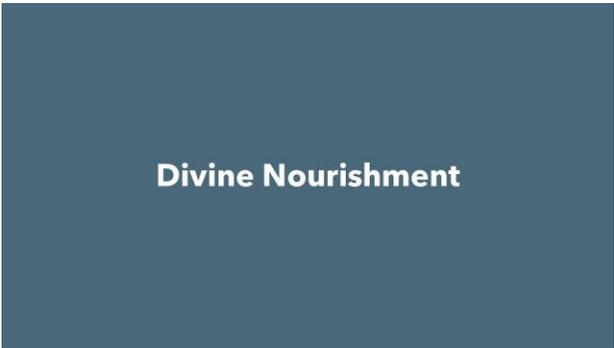
When you initially look at the need, it was for physical fulfillment.



## Physical Fulfillment

They were hungry and there was nothing to eat. If they went back home, they would collapse before they got home. Jesus shows this great compassion and their hearts, and our hearts need be open to see that compassion in times of need.

However, the actual need is not physical fulfillment alone, it is something more spiritual. What Jesus was actually giving the people was:



## Divine Nourishment

It was food for their spirit. Jesus was teaching them about God, and their need for a relationship with Him. It was about the redemption story, how to have a complete relationship with God through Jesus Christ. And that that divine nourishment satisfies the soul completely. It wasn't the miracles; the actual feeding or raising people from the dead or freeing people from demonic oppression. The divine nourishment is Jesus' words that have come from God. That is what satisfies the soul.

In times of our need our hearts must be softened towards Jesus' compassion.

Mark 8:10, "he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha."

After this Jesus gets into the boat with his disciples and they go to a region called Dalmunutha. He is going back to the place that is predominantly Jewish. As he is about to go there, he runs into a group of people who are not in agreement with what Jesus is doing.

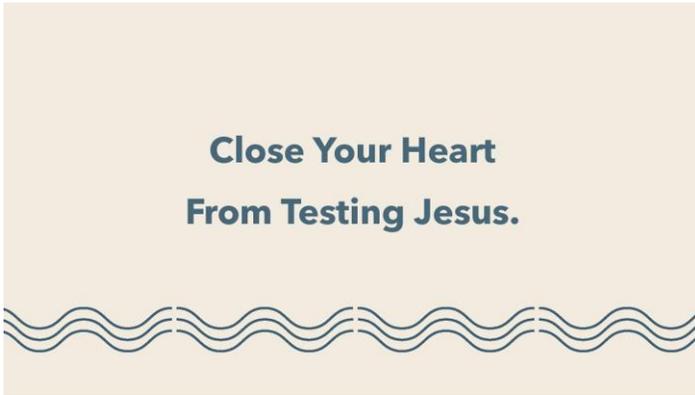
Can you guess who is waiting for Jesus when he gets to the other side of the sea of Galilee?

For those of you that have been following us in the book of Mark, you will know who this group is. It was actually a group of people that really did not like Jesus.

If you guessed it was the Pharisees, you are absolutely correct.

Mark 8.11, “The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven.”

The second way to soften our hearts to Jesus this is to:



So here is the thing, the Pharisees have this desire to constantly go against everything that Jesus does because their theological view is not in line with what Jesus is doing and who Jesus is. Sometimes when we are in a situation of need, we fail to realize that God is with us in that situation, and instead of persevering we decide to take it on ourselves and test God by asking Him to show us a sign of his faithfulness.

The Pharisees are self absorbed people. For them, when they have needs, they:



They believe in their own thinking, in their own philosophy, in what they think is correct. But they are actually, absolutely, wrong. The Greek word for “testing” actually means to harass. It was not just a polite discussion or debate. They were deeply hostile towards Jesus.

This hostility manifests itself into a demand for a sign. A demand to show his faithfulness and his divinity. The interesting thing about this is that Jesus has performed many miracles. Jesus has set the captives free spiritually and has raised people from the dead. He has fed people and has calmed the storms.

All of these things that Jesus did, were not done in private; they were done in public. But the Pharisees were there wanting to harass Jesus because they believed everything he was doing was because of the devil doing it through him and not God.

Nothing has changed with the Pharisees; they always believe in what they want to believe in. They believe in their own path. Many times when we are in need, we choose to be our own on her own path and question God, testing him of his faithfulness and his divinity to see if He can actually meet our needs. What we really need to do is to trust.

## Trusting God's Way

What we need to do is trust God's way because he is God. Trust him because he is the Savior of the world, the one who called you into relationship with him to have life to the fullest and eternal life after death. We need to trust in God's way when we are in a situation where we have a great need. We don't need to test him and ask him to prove himself because he already has.

When we have known over and over and over again that He has been with us in our times of need. No matter what has happened in our life, he has shown himself to be God and to be faithful in the past, we can know he will be faithful in the present and in the future.

You know what happens when we test God and when we choose to go our own way on our own path? It is the same thing that happened in this passage in verse 12.

Mark 8:12-13, "He sighed deeply and said, 'Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to it.' Then he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side."

The English language is really unable to give us a full understanding of how Jesus felt. In the original language, the word 'sigh' is more than a heavy sigh, it is total exasperation. It is grief and utter disappointment. Of all the people in the world, the Pharisees, the teachers of the law should have been the first to recognize who Jesus was because they studied the scriptures, that was their job. But instead, they were against Jesus. It was not a matter of forgetting the scriptures or a lack of intelligence, it was their belief in their own path.

Jesus decides that he is not playing this game with them, he has already given signs out of compassion for people and the Pharisees refused to see this. No more signs are needed. It is interesting that the Pharisees are trying to judge Jesus in what he was doing, but in fact it is the other way around. Jesus, as God, can do this, and casts judgment on them, specifically on what they have done. Their intentional denial and rejection of God, their selfish way instead of the way of God. For some reason, they feel know God better than God does.

We must never get to that point. We must always soften our hearts and trust in God's way no matter what need we are in.

The third way to soften our hearts to Jesus is to:

**Protect Your Heart  
From Hardness.**



This is something we have to do daily because we interact in the spiritual realm and the enemy is there wanting to put a wedge between us and Christ.

Carrying on in Mark 8, Jesus is back in the boat and he and disciples are now going back to the Decapolis.

Mark 8.14-15, “The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat. ‘Be careful,’ Jesus warned them. ‘Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod.’”

When Jesus is in the boat with his disciples he is thinking about the interaction with the Pharisees. It is so unfortunate that they just do not see who Jesus really is. It is in this setting that Jesus interacts with his disciples. With love for his disciples, he gives them a warning to be careful to watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod.

The yeast, some translations state leaven, refers to a small amount of evil or leaven or yeast to spread as dough to make bread. Yeast of the Pharisees refers to the hypocrisy. The yeast of Herod has to do with worldliness.

Mark 8.16, “They discussed this with one another and said, ‘It is because we have no bread.’”

As Jesus is talking about this to the disciples, they are not seeing things the way Jesus has seen them. They look at each other and they think that Jesus is talking about physical bread, and that they do not have enough. I could see him in the boat looking at each other wanting to blame one another. But it has nothing to do with physical bread at all.

Here we have Jesus wanting to protect the disciples’ hearts from the hardness of sin that will constantly affect them. His desire is for his disciples to have a softened heart and Jesus starts by ask them some questions:

Mark 8.17, “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?’”

This language of hardened hearts is similar to the passage in Mark when Jesus walks on water.

Mark 8.18, “Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don’t you remember?”

These questions that Jesus asks are actually rhetorical in nature. They are meant to be answered in the negative and act as a strong warning to the disciples. For they were the ones that were with him, they saw him perform all these great works and they heard him speak the truth and they did not understand. Their view of Jesus was as incorrect just like the Pharisees. The only difference is that these disciples were with Jesus all the time in the Pharisees were not. These questions are similar to what is written in Isaiah 6: 10-12.

Isaiah 6.10-12, “Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.”

Everything that the disciples were doing was opposite to what Jesus was trying to show them. They were leaning on:



**Worldly Wisdom**

We assume that the disciples were actually in the know of who Jesus was, but this passage clearly demonstrates that they did not really in the know who Jesus as the son of God. They had not protected their hearts from hardening. For them faith was seeing not necessarily believing. It was the human, worldly wisdom that they were relying on.

Jesus is wanting them to see things differently not through worldly wisdom but through:



## Spiritual Discernment

He goes back to the miracle of the bread and asks his disciples a few questions. He is hoping that their spiritual eyes and ears are open because they need to see the truth.

Mark 8:19-20, “When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?’ ‘Twelve,’ they replied. ‘And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?’ They answered, ‘Seven.’”

They have all seen the evidence. Do they really have spiritual eyes that see or spiritual ears that hear? They should have remembered how abundantly Jesus had provided for them, not once but twice.

We are human beings, but we need to have spiritual discernment. We are naturally deaf and blind to the things of God, and we naturally have these hard hearts. When the Word of God comes to us, sometimes it bounces off our hearts instead of being absorbed by them. It is as if our hearts are so hard that they are like metal or stone.

Mark 8:21, “He said to them, ‘Do you still not understand?’”

This passage ends with this question, do you still not understand?

The only way to understand is to have spiritual discernment. Spiritual discernment comes only when we allow the Holy Spirit to open up our eyes and ears with the truth of God.

We can easily look at the disciples in this and just write them off as individuals who are very dull in their faith. We can sit in judgment over them, but we would be wrong. Because we are just like the disciples when it comes to our hearts. Actually, we are better off than the disciples, they had Jesus for 3 years, we on the other hand as followers of Christ, have the Holy Spirit with in to testify the goodness of God that should allow us to have spiritual discernment. The Holy Spirit is the one that guides us and helps us in discernment.

Here are some questions to reflect on:

When you are in situations of great need how do you respond?

Are you constantly and intentionally softening your heart towards Jesus?

Is your heart open to Jesus’ compassion? Is your heart closed from testing Jesus? Are you protecting your heart from hardness?

What will happen when your next need arises? Will you let your heart become hardened against Christ or will you be a disciple of Christ and soften your heart towards Jesus?

It is so easy to be in a panic, it is so easy to be negative and say this is not going to workout. It's really easy to panic and not trust in God. It's really easy to put our hands up in the air and just give up. I want to encourage you to remember God's compassion over you. Remember what he has done in the past, remember all the good things that have happened and how he has always been faithful and will be faithful to the very end of every need. I encourage you to allow the Holy Spirit to guide you in spiritual discernment when the enemy comes in and tries to persuade against God's love for you.

The incredible part about the heart is that everything flows from it. It is a key component, yes in the physical world it is because it pumps the blood through all your body giving oxygen and strength. In the spiritual world all things flow from the heart and that affects our spiritual lives.

What kind of heart do you want to have? One that is hard like the Pharisees or one that is softened towards Jesus.

Be reminded of Proverbs 4:23, "Above all else, guard your heart for everything you do those from it."