

Dr. Mark Jennings, Mark, Lecture 13, Mark 7:24-8:13, Syrophenician Woman, 4000

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This is Dr. Mark Jennings in his teaching on the Gospel of Mark. This is session 13 on Mark 7:24-8:13, Syrophenician Woman, 4000.

I'm going to be with you again as we continue to work through Gospel of Mark.

We're in the middle of Mark chapter 7 and as we work through today and finish up in 7 and get into 8, we're coming close to the end of that first major section in the Gospel of Mark. You may recall from the opening lecture that Mark is ultimately divided into four sections, but two major sections. The first major section is what we've been looking at, and that is really setting up the authority of Jesus.

We've been seeing all the way through the power of Jesus to strengthen his teaching and his miracles and his deeds, as well as how his authority is in conflict with the authority of the religious leaders of the time. We saw that even most recently in chapter 7 when we were discussing Jesus' rebuke of the religious leaders and the process of Corban that they had set in motion, and the way that they had even understood and allowed to exist enabled, in fact, even encouraged, the prohibition against following the law. By that, I mean they encouraged a practice that went against honoring your mother and your father, and we've seen that working all the way through.

This next part of chapter 7, there's a change that occurs. It's a very interesting episode between this interaction between Jesus and this Syrophenician woman. It occurs in Mark chapter 7, verses 24 through 30.

I'm going to read that for you, and then I want to discuss it. Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it, yet he could not keep his presence secret.

In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an evil spirit came and fell at his feet. The woman was Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.

First, let the children eat all they want, he told her, for it's not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs. Lord, she replied, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs. Then he told her, for such a reply, you may go.

The demon has left your daughter. She went home and found her child lying on the bed and the demon gone. Now, from the outset, this looks like a typical healing account.

You have the same setup that we're used to. Jesus comes into an area, he tries to come in in secret. Notice he tries to not be known.

Word gets out where he is. Someone who's in desperate need comes and asks for his help. There are some interesting aspects in this.

First of all, think about where this is occurring. Jesus has left Galilee and he goes about 35 miles northwest, if you will, to Tyre on the Mediterranean. Now, this was a place that was known for its commerce, was known for its trade in Phoenicia.

Of course, there's a very interesting history regarding this location and the story of Israel. David and Solomon traded with the king of Tyre. The prophets also announced judgment against it because of its arrogance and its greed.

During the New Testament times, this area is often spoken of as one of the enemies of the Jews. So, geographically, Jesus has entered into an area that is Gentile in quality, if you will. He's trying to maintain a low profile, so the place is very interesting.

But this woman, which is also fascinating, this is a woman who comes to him who is Greek. So, it breaks through what might have been some social barriers there, both in terms of ethnicity and the separation between Jew and Greek, but also female and male. Interestingly enough, to maybe stress it even more, Mark calls her a Syrophenician.

She's under Syria, but also Phoenician, so that's how that term comes. Matthew actually calls her a Canaanite, which is a real old ancient term regarding the residents of this area. So, she comes to Jesus, and her desperateness is clear.

She begs Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. But what's interesting here is Jesus responds really first with a refusal. This comment, first let the children eat all they want, he told her, for it's not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.

This statement, which seems at first blush a very strange statement to make, the ideas behind it has this relationship between Jewish people and Gentiles. So, when Jesus talks about first letting the children eat all they want, the reference would be to the children of Israel, the Jewish people. And that's played out by this idea of the dogs.

And the dogs was not an uncommon insult that was given to Gentiles, that characterized Gentiles. They would be referred to as dogs, in contradistinction to Israel. We see something similar happening, this epithet in Philippians 3, for example.

The picture here, in other words, is not of a family pet. It's to be received as an insult. I recently traveled a few years ago to different parts of Eastern Europe, around the Mediterranean, in Macedonia, Bulgaria, and Greece.

One of the things that I found fascinating in moving through those different economic areas was that Macedonia was poorer socioeconomically than Bulgaria was. At the time, you could also see a distinction between Bulgaria and Greece. And you could see it actually in the dogs. So, when we were in Macedonia, the dogs that we would see while we were there often were packs that would roam.

They didn't belong to someone. They were scavengers that were in the roads. And they were everywhere.

And they were usually very thin, very scrawny, very unattractive. They would get into the trash. They would operate in a lot of ways to what we might associate with rats, for example.

When we moved into Bulgaria, there was still some presence of that in some neighborhoods, but in other neighborhoods, you wouldn't see the dogs. Then we got into the parts of Greece that we were in. We weren't in all of Greece, but in the parts we were in, that's when we started seeing dogs as pets.

So, you could almost see it as a place about 10 years ago; as the wealth of an area changed, you could see that reflected in the dogs. And here, that scavenger dog element, that who roots in the trash, etc., that's the idea behind this insult. In this ancient culture, it was extremely unlikely for Jews to have a dog as a pet.

So, this isn't a positive statement, if you will. Now, the question becomes, is Jesus being playful with her, or is there a refusal in view here? And it's interesting because there's a debate that happens regarding this statement. There's a back-and-forth.

And what I find fascinating is almost in all of the exchanges of dialogue where someone, we're used to someone coming up to Jesus and challenging him, usually Jesus comes out the winner, if you will. But here, it seems that the Syrophenician woman gets the best of Jesus. And I think, if we're reading Mark correctly, there's again this need for muscular evidence of faith.

That simply comes to him, asking for a miracle, that Jesus wants to pull more out of her. And if there's deliberate purposefulness here, even this statement about

children, bread, and dogs comes into view. And so, the woman responds Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.

And I think the sense of that is she understands the sense of what Jesus is saying, is that he is Jewish. He's coming to the Jew first and then to the Gentile idea, perhaps, but he's Jewish. And that he's here primarily interacting with the Jewish people.

In fact, that's the mission he gave to the disciples. Like they went to Jewish households. There have been hints of the Gentile mission, but it's primarily, he's mostly been around Galilee.

And I think his response is that he wants to pull out of her. Just to see how strong she is willing to put her trust in Jesus, to express her faith and her desperateness. And so when she responds, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs, notice there's a very strong statement of humility there.

She doesn't say, how dare you call me a dog, how dare you present Jewish people versus Greek people in such terms. She doesn't sit here and demand, I matter, listen to me, the value. Instead, she says, but yes, even the dogs can get crumbs.

And there's almost an acceptance, if you will, of Jesus' statement. And then he told her, for such a reply. And I think that's important because what Jesus typically affirms is faith.

We've seen that throughout the Gospel of Mark, because of your faith, for your faith, etc. And so, I think for such a reply, we're to understand that such a reply is a declaration of faith. It's an expression of full dependence on Jesus and humility before Jesus, a recognition of his authority.

And he said, for such a reply, you may go. The demon has left your daughter. So, whether this was a strong debate or a playful one, the sense of it carries the same. And you have here, then, this beautiful expression.

She went home and found her child lying on the bed and the demon gone. So, the same is true of its immediacy. You have this expression of how what Jesus has done for the Jewish people who are suffering, he's doing for the Gentiles.

The Syrophenician woman here gets a very strong, positive affirmation. Notice here that there is not a sort of separate act that's done. There's no different revelation that having the demon leave her daughter joins what Jesus has been doing with the people of Israel, the children.

Also, here, representing the dogs, the Gentiles, he's doing the same to both. And I think that indicates that the separation of children and dogs, even if we can use those terms, is going away. That their receiving is the same act of grace.

And it's probably worth noting here that such a positive statement about a Gentile woman would have been very scandalous to come from a Jewish male. And so that this act of this miracle, thus bringing out the demon from the daughter, that aspect of it is almost muted. When you think in terms of the other exorcisms where the demons have engaged or discussed, you have a legion; what do you have to do with us? And where the miracle, the immediacy of the miracle, be silent, the distress of it.

Here, the actual possession is muted. The exorcism is muted. What is stressed is the dialogue.

The dialogue between the Syrophenician woman and Jesus. And so, what Mark is hinting at is, I don't want you to see the exorcism. I want you to see Jesus having deliberately gone into a Gentile area, now receiving and affirming and acknowledging the faith of this woman.

That's the stress we see. This sets the stage for the next miracle, which occurs. So you've got this sequence of miracles that are working through.

And when we see the healing of a deaf and mute man, I want to look through this a little bit, beginning with Mark 7, 31 through verse 37. Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. I'm going to in a minute talk about that trip because it's a very interesting geographic progression.

There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk. And they begged Jesus to place his hand on him. And he took him aside, away from the crowd.

Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, Ephatha, which means be open.

At this, the man's ears were opened. His tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly. Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone, but the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it.

People were overwhelmed with amazement. He has done everything well, they said. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.

Interesting as we look through this, there are some fascinating elements in this healing. First of all, the healing of this man, he's both hearing and speech impaired. And the account of this has no real parallel in the other Gospels.

Matthew 15:29-31, there's a summary that would maybe bring this into it. But it seems really unique here in the Gospel of Mark. And I think what's interesting as we sort of look through this is that this is occurring in the region of Decapolis.

Now this isn't the first time we've had this geographical place, this region of cities, this Gentile area, predominantly Gentile area. We saw this with the legion, the exorcism of the demoniac. And recall there that the response to Jesus was rather less than hospitable.

Recall that he had done this great exorcism and here was this man who now was sitting in his right mind. And in the middle of this, the people come and they see what has happened. They see the pigs.

Remember, Jesus had let the demons go into the pigs. And then the herd crashed over. They see all of this occur, and they ask Jesus to leave.

In fact, the now restored man desires to come with Jesus. Jesus, somewhat surprisingly, says no, but he does tell him to go tell people what has happened.

Now, that was surprising in a couple of ways. One that you would have thought Jesus would have said yes, come, instead of telling him to stay. But also Jesus typically told people to be silent about such acts.

But he had told this man to go tell anyone. And it looks like this man was successful. That there was a positive Gentile reception to at least what the man was saying.

And so, if you couple what was happening with the Syrophenician woman in this positive statement, and then he's moved even more into the heart of the Gentile area, into the spot of Decapolis, and he's got this huge positive reception. The best way to explain this positive reception, I think, is that there has been word going out about him ever since the amazing exorcism. The demoniac was spreading news, and people were getting excited in a very similar way to what we saw in Galilee.

Now I mentioned the geography is fairly interesting here. One of the things that's usually nice about living on this side of 2,000 years from these events is we almost have no concept of the map. In fact, I often advise students when they're reading through the Bible to have a familiarity and have a map with them so they can see where different things are happening.

And if you look the way Mark describes Jesus' travel in verse 31, he left the vicinity of Tyre, went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee, and into the region of the Decapolis. Well, this means that Jesus travels about 20 miles north to Sidon, then southeast across the River of the Entes, and from there, he goes through Caesarea Philippi to Decapolis on the east side of Galilee. It's almost a horseshoe-shaped travel, around 120 miles.

One commentator described it: for those of you familiar with United States geography, it would be like going from Washington, D.C. to Richmond, Virginia by way of Philadelphia. It's hardly a straight, necessary route. Now, many scholars have said this speaks against its accuracy, or that Mark shows ignorance of actual geography or is combining different events.

I actually think it works the other way. That the oddness speaks to the accuracy. That it indicates that Jesus was doing a very similar mission activity here in the Gentile lands that he did when he was in Galilee.

That when he was in Galilee, he was constantly on the move. And here, in these Gentile regions, he's doing the same thing. He's constantly on the move.

In fact, such a trip into the Gentile regions to do this type of travel, I think, indicates a purposeful inclusion, that he's wanting to go deeper into Gentile area. Another thing that's unique is the description of this man that we have here. Someone who cannot hear and also cannot speak.

And that Mark wants to make clear we understand this particular miracle occurred. Remember, Mark is choosing. Jesus is doing many, many miracles.

And so it's not as if Mark is presenting an exclusive list. He's choosing which miracles to present. And it's hard not to think that this miracle, this healing of a man who was mute, doesn't have in mind Isaiah 35:6. Speaking of a time when the lame will leap like a deer, and the mute shall shout for joy.

When the tongues will be loose, and they shall shout for joy, water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. That here there is this stress on the mute being able to speak. Maybe as also evidence that what Isaiah spoke of in 35 now is coming to pass with Jesus.

There's a fascinating amount of detail on this miracle. If you just think about how little was said about the actual exorcism and how Jesus, with the Syrophenician woman, healed from a distance. Didn't even see.

Just said, the demon has left your daughter. And then we get the evidence of it, that she's lying in the bed and the mother bears witness. But it's from a great distance.

Here, this miracle happens very differently. Notice what we see. He puts his fingers in the man's ears.

There's a spit that is involved. He touches the man's tongue. He looks up to heaven.

He gives a deep sigh and then he says, be open. We actually get the Aramaic before we get the translation of it. This is the only place in Mark where we get such direct touching of an organ, like the tongue.

This is one of the few places we get spit. We'll get it actually with blind eyes. But here, this use of this spit, where he puts his fingers in the man's ear, that would be the deafness, and then he spit and touched the man's tongue.

Such a strange response it seems. Some have argued that putting the fingers in the ears was to create an opening so that the demon that was causing the deafness would have a way out. That seems hardly supported by the Gospel of Mark.

The idea of the spit has been discussed in terms of, was it a magic device that would have been here, and Jesus is a magician. But again, we haven't seen Jesus follow that type of behavior that is sometimes associated in the ancient world. Others have argued that this type of activity is what a Gentile would expect, and so Jesus is doing what might be fitting a Gentile.

Interestingly enough, the Syrophenician woman seems very content with Jesus not coming to address her daughter physically. Honestly, in a lot of ways, it's hard to figure out why Jesus does the spit and the touching of the tongue. I think we have to be careful before we put too much significance into it.

I do think one of the things that it does show here is that there's a picture here of Jesus making things clean, or making them work, of what was broken. That the spittle of Jesus has this idea of something from him that is now going to this man and restoring this man. If that's right, I think we have to be careful there.

It does give a bit of a sacramental quality to it, or perhaps even a foreshadowing of the blood sacrifice of Jesus. The comfort I have is to say, on the one hand, Jesus purposefully does it this way. He has a reason for doing it this way.

He could have simply done it from a distance, had he chosen. But he brought the person outside of the crowd, away from the crowd, and purposefully does something to the ears and does something to the tongue. Even if the meaning is lost to us, we assume there was a reason for it.

Maybe it was simply to do something that would have made sense in the cultural vernacular of the Gentile. The Aramaic that's given here is probably because of the stress of the memorable nature of this miracle. I don't think, be open, I don't think this is some sort of magic formula he's stating.

It might even indicate the memory. But it also draws attention, I think, to the fact that Jesus is Jewish. There's a Jewishness about him, of which he's now speaking Aramaic, and that is being stressed, even in the Gentile lands.

You know, when we look at that, I think there is an Isaiah reference, which I mentioned, but it's also hard not to miss a hint of Exodus 4:11. Where the Lord says to Moses, this is the context where Moses does not want to be the spokesperson, says he's unworthy, and talks about his speech. The Lord says to Moses, who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the Lord? So, we have this mute idea, Jesus is doing what we've been seeing throughout Mark, of doing what God does, of unmuting that which has been muted. Now, when we think through this, there is something, a bit of a change.

Remember last time Jesus did this huge miracle in the area, the legion exorcism. Jesus did not tell the man to be quiet. But here, in verses 36 and 37, Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone.

He commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. People were overwhelmed with amazement.

He has done everything well, they said. He even makes the deaf hear, and the mute speak. We've been talking a little bit about, with the Syrophenician woman, how Jesus is canceling out the distinction between Jew and Gentile.

Here, we also see the response of Jesus to this miracle, and then the people's response to Jesus, also is an indication of the canceling out of this distinction. One, how are they acting? They're amazed. They're amazed in the same way that the Jewish crowds were amazed.

They were amazed at the miracles. But what we're gleaning now is this amazement is not an indication of faith in Jesus or a right understanding of who Jesus is, but an amazement in what he's able to do. The crowds of the Gentiles now are very much in line with the crowds of the Jews.

But also, we find here this command to be silent. Whereas before, there wasn't this command, now there is this command. The fact that Jesus is giving this command in the Gentile lands is not typically what we've been seeing.

Usually, the command for silence happens in Jewish circles. I wonder here if what we are finding is Jesus once again trying to temper down an overwhelming popularity that is occurring. There is an attempt to try to keep the crowds at a minimum.

This would make sense since we know that when Jesus entered this region, even moving in with the Syrophoenician woman, he had tried to be secret. He had tried to keep his presence there somewhat unknown. I'd like to move now to thinking about Mark chapter 8. Again, we're now reaching the very end of this first major section.

We're still dealing with Gentile lands. We're keeping a continuation of the story that's occurring. I want to look here at the first nine verses.

I'll bleed a little bit into verse 10. You'll notice there are some striking similarities to this account with what we've had previously. During those days, another large crowd gathered.

Since they had done nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, I have compassion for these people. They have already been with me for 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.

His disciples answered, but where in this remote place or wilderness can anyone get enough bread to feed them? How many loaves do you have? Jesus asked. Seven, they replied. He told the crowds 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. 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. About four thousand were present.

And having sent them away, he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha. Now, it's frequently argued that this is a second version of the same event. That this, just like we previously had a feeding of the five thousand, now we have a feeding of the four thousand.

And that what has occurred is a particular story that, as it went through oral tradition, became two separate accounts that Mark then brought into his gospel. They've somehow gotten morphed into separate events. And when you look at them, there are indeed some similarities.

First of all, they're both "miraculous feeding. Both of them occur in a remote area. Both have the question, how many loaves do you have? There's a command to recline that is similar.

The prayer and the participation of the disciples is similar. The words and the serving are in the same sequence. There's also the phrase, the people ate and were satisfied.

That occurs in both. Leftovers were gathered. There's a dismissal of the crowd at the end and Jesus entering into a boat.

So many will see a lot of these similarities and go, this is the same story. But there are some important differences that we have to account for as well. Five loaves and two fish versus seven loaves and a few fish.

And they're not presented in the same sequence. And even the language used for the fish is a different word. It's a diminutive form of the word in the Greek.

And the few fish meaning probably a smaller fish. Some have speculated some sort of sardine type of fish. The number of people is different.

In the first it was 5,000 men, which meant there were even probably more than that. Where here, it's 4,000 in total. In the first count, the 5,000 people are there for one day with Jesus.

Here it's been three days. In the first it was springtime. You had the reference to the green grass, which I think was a reference to the Psalms.

Here, there's no mention of green grass or any season. In the first, the people are put into very specific groupings before they are served, not in this one.

The number of the leftovers are different between the first one and this one. And even more important, in the first one, Jesus has compassion because they are sheep without a shepherd. Here Jesus has compassion over the crowd, the gathering, because they've been there three days without food.

There's no reference to sheep without a shepherd. In the second one, Jesus is much more prominent. Remember the first feeding, the disciples had come off of their ministry work, where they had been doing the same things that Jesus had done.

The disciples recognized the problem, the people need food, and they come to Jesus. Jesus tells them to do it, and that's when they display an inability to even consider that. Here it is Jesus who discerns the need.

Jesus is much more prominent. It isn't the disciples coming to Jesus with the problem. Jesus is directing here instead of responding.

All of this suggests that this is a different miracle. One of the things, returning back to this idea of oral tradition, is the argument that you have a single event that has now morphed into separate. One of the difficulties with that argument is in oral tradition, one of the aspects that would mean firm were numbers.

Numbers were usually a strong anchor in oral tradition. You wouldn't expect 5,000 to become 4,000, 5 loaves to become 7 loaves, 2 fish to become a few fish, 1 day to become 3 days. While different other aspects of oral tradition would sometimes morph, numbers were usually a strong constant, at least from what we've been able to glean.

I think when we look at this, what we're seeing is we have a different account. Now, what do we make of the similarities? I think Mark is very purposeful in these similarities. Mark has been stressing the breakdown of the line between Jew and Gentile in this part of his discussion.

He's been stressing that, both with the interaction with the Syrophenician woman and even in the healing of the deaf and mute, connecting it, I think, with Isaiah and perhaps even Exodus. There's been a flattening of this if you will. The feeding of the 4,000 then also becomes a way to show the strong similarity of how Jesus is responding to Gentiles' needs as he is also responding to Jewish needs.

So, I don't think it's accidental that he has a second feeding. Some of the things, too, that stand out here as we consider this passage is notice this crowd has the desperate nature of the Gentiles. They've been with Jesus for three days and nothing to eat.

That's beyond just being hungry. Now it's becoming significantly hunger. Whatever food they might have brought with them, if they brought anything with them, they have exhausted it.

Some have even come great distances. So, there's a stress on their desperate need. Once again, the disciples show spiritual insensitivity, not being culturally insensitive, but spiritually insensitive.

When Jesus is concerned about their physical state and the fact that they won't be able to make it all the way home in their current state of hunger, the disciples again ask, well, where can anyone get enough bread around here to feed them? It's frequently asked, well, this argued, how could the disciples be so foolish? Had they not just witnessed the feeding of the 5,000? Couldn't they naturally assume there would be such an amazing feeding here as well? Well, I'm going to hold off answering

that question just for a second because Mark, I think, wants the reader to also be asking, how is it possible that the disciples aren't remembering, aren't gathering, aren't expecting Jesus to do a miracle? I think that the way this is even structured is that Mark wants us to ask that question about the disciples because in the episodes that are about to happen, I think he begins to answer that question. You know, here's where, too, I think we have to be careful about the numbers and putting too much significance into the symbolic nature of numbers. I do think when we were looking at the feeding of the 5,000, that if you recall when we discussed the feeding of the 5,000, there were ample, I think, references to, significant references to the story of Israel.

You had the Exodus imagery, you had the feeding miraculously right out in the wilderness, you had the putting in orderly groups, which I think draw attention to God orderly, organizing Israel. You had the 12 baskets, I think 12 is significant in that context. Here, you don't have any of those other aspects; you don't have any other symbols that might support looking at the significance of a number.

And so when we see 7, how many loaves do you have? Seven. I think we have to be very hesitant before we make that 7 because 7 is a theological number before we make that 7 some sort of carrier of other meaning. Because I don't think we have a lot of evidence of other meanings involved that might support that.

The similarity, of course, is everyone ate their fill and was satisfied. And if these feedings, these miraculous feedings, have this idea of messianic banquet, of messianic provision, then what the feeding of the 4,000 indicates is that while Jesus' compassion for them is different, is because of their hunger, not because they are suffering as the sheep of Israel without a shepherd, that the result though is still the same, which is their participation in the messianic banquet, participation in the great abundance that the Messiah provides, to the point of full satisfaction. Even if there was a to the children first, and then to the dog's idea, what the children and the dogs enjoy are the same.

The same feast. That here the feeding of the 4,000 indicates the Gentiles aren't receiving crumbs. They are still receiving the full meal.

And so, I think Mark has purposely set that in motion. Last little bit before we take a break, is I want to look then at Mark 8:11 through 13. It's interesting, this is very abrupt.

So, he got in a boat with the disciples to go to another region, and then all of a sudden we jump. The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. So the Pharisees have sort of been absent at this point, but now all of a sudden they are abruptly back on the scene to test him.

They asked him for a sign from heaven. 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 in the boat, and crossed to the other side of the lake.

I want to think through this. Make sure geographically, and maybe symbolically, we are understanding the move here. We've left the Gentile lands where there has been this real positive acceptance.

There have been hints of disobedience. We've seen hints of disobedience when he tells them to be silent, and they are not. But there has been this great acceptance, the Syrophenician woman, the feeding of the 4,000.

And then, as we turn back, notice the harsh distinction between the Gentile reception, positive reception, and the Pharisees. The Pharisees come back, and of course, by now, what do we know about the Pharisees? The Pharisees are not interested in really learning from Jesus. We've already been told based on the restoration of the man with the withered hand that the Pharisees had paired with the Herodians and are seeking to kill Jesus.

So, the sides have been firmly distinct. But when we see here that they come back onto the scene to question him, which we've seen a lot, to test him, remember the testing here has this idea of trying to find Jesus, trying to create a situation where Jesus fails, where Jesus falters. They are seeking to undo him.

And so, they came to test him and asked him for a sign from heaven. The irony here is hard to miss. They are asking for a sign from heaven.

This idea of a sign from heaven, in other words, there is probably another way of saying proof or something from God that would authenticate who you are or what you are saying. They are wanting proof of evidence that is not uncommon in the Old Testament for the great figures of God, Moses being the key example, to be accompanied by such signs. The idea that a sign would accompany Jesus is, therefore, not horrible or dismissive.

In fact, Jesus has been doing amazing signs that indicate who he is. His miracles have been evidence of his authority. He has been connecting his miracles with his authority to forgive sins, which only God can do, with his authority to understand the intent of the Sabbath, with his authority over creation, with the calming of the storm.

Again, those things that only God can do. The problem here, I think, is why authenticating signs are not uncommon as evidence of God's presence. They shouldn't be considered as definitive proof.

Deuteronomy 13 itself warns against being deceived by the signs that false prophets do. The proof of a prophet, the true prophet, is that what he says comes to pass. And also, in general, you have an occasional exception where, for example, Isaiah tells King Ahaz to ask for a sign of God.

But for the most part, asking for a signature is prohibited. It's hard not to miss, I think, in this picture, this idea of testing, this idea of demanding a sign for authenticating proof. I think that, within all of this, I hear Deuteronomy 6, Exodus 17, and what occurred at Massa.

The Israelites demanded God do something to show evidence of his covenantal relationship. In fact, in the Temptation narrative, think of Matthew the Temptation narrative, for example, when Jesus responds in the Temptation with you shall not test the Lord your God. That evidence, that scene was occurring where Satan was trying to get Jesus to make God do something, jump off the top of the temple because God has promised to send the angels to protect you.

He was trying to get Jesus to make God keep his word if you will. So, there's this idea of showing evidence of God's presence in this disobedient Israel. In fact, I think these hints even become shouts, if you will, in this, in Jesus' response.

He sighed deeply and said, why does this generation ask for a sign? Well, this generation is in a wilderness context; if we're working in the context of the Israelites, we are referring to disobedient Israel in the wilderness. I mean, Moses speaks of this crooked and depraved generation. And so, we have here Jesus issuing this language of this generation, which he's already done.

He's already been treating the Pharisees and connecting them with disobedient Israelites earlier in Mark. And so, we have this generation testing language and Mark, I think, is stressing the irony of this, is that what had just occurred was a feeding in a wilderness. Two feedings, the 5,000 and the 4,000.

Miraculous feeding, manna, you know, exodus story. I mean, how much more of a sign from heaven does one need in terms of Old Testament language than what has already been provided? And so, when Jesus speaks of this generation asking for a sign, truly I tell you, no sign will be given to it. That declaration of no sign will be given, but it doesn't mean any evidence of divine authenticity, you know, authenticating miracles or events will be given.

Because there have been many that have been given, and of course, others that will await. But rather, this generation will be unable to see any of this as an authenticating sign. That this statement will not give any sign isn't about the actual event but the perception of it.

That this is judgment language. Judgment language that fits with what Jesus has been saying about the religious leaders in terms of being hardened, having eyes but not seeing. We'll continue with Mark 8 at our next time.

Thank you.

This is Dr. Mark Jennings in his teaching on the Gospel of Mark. This is session 13 on Mark 7:24-8:13, Syrophenician Woman, 4000.