

# Pack Fools

Mark 8:1-21 December 10, 2025

What's the worst thing you ever forgot to pack? Whether for a vacation or just an errand? Usually it's something that's not that big of a deal - a toothbrush or a bathing suit or a phone charger.

I forget to pack work gloves when I need them. "We're gonna bring a bunch of rusty garbage and broken glass to the dump." I'm out the door with nothing but my keys.

Tonight the disciples find themselves on the receiving end of a *strong* rebuke from the Lord. It's not just a, "Hey guys, you need to do a little better," talk. Jesus speaks very seriously to them, warning them that they are thinking and acting *almost* as if they were non-believing outsiders.<sup>1</sup>

They thought the problem was that they forgot to pack bread. The real problem was that they failed to perceive what Jesus was saying to them, what He was trying to teach Him, and the true depth of the work He was doing in their midst.

As disciples we want to learn from this moment and remind ourselves to see Christ's work with spiritual eyes, hear His words with spiritual ears, and take to heart His warning to watch out not only for bad influences outside of us, but also areas of hardening in our hearts.

**Mark 8:1-3 - In those days there was again a large crowd, and they had nothing to eat. He called the disciples and said to them, <sup>2</sup> "I have compassion on the crowd, because they've already stayed with me three days and have nothing to eat. <sup>3</sup> If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, and some of them have come a long distance."**

This is a second miraculous feeding of a great multitude in Mark. It's very similar to what we saw in chapter 6 when Jesus fed 5,000. A lot of the language and the mechanics are the same. But there are some notable differences.

The foremost is that the previous feeding was all Jews. And there were all these connections to Moses and Israel in the wilderness. Here Jesus is in the Decapolis, meaning the group was largely Gentile, or at very least a mix of Jews and Gentiles.<sup>2</sup> When Jesus said that some of them have come "a long distance," He used a term that was often used to speak of Gentiles from distant lands.<sup>3</sup>

In this scene, Jesus is making a major theological statement. He will do for the nations what He does for Israel. He will bring Gentiles into His flock because He has the *same* compassion for them. Jesus makes Himself responsible for their nourishment and care.

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Gaebelien, D. A. Carson, Walter Wessel, and Walter Liefeld *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 8: Matthew, Mark, Luke*

<sup>2</sup> While some scholars suggest this group is also Jewish, the majority understand this to be a miracle worked in the Decapolis. See WPNT, NIVAC, EBC, NAC, Utley.

<sup>3</sup> Ben Witherington *The Gospel Of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*

Another difference is that, this time, the disciples didn't come to Jesus saying, "Can you get rid of the crowd?" Instead, Jesus calls the 12 together and presents the feeding problem to them. We'd *think* that the disciples could see what was happening and that they would expect Jesus to do *again* what He had done *before*. But they don't.

**Mark 8:4 - <sup>4</sup> His disciples answered him, "Where can anyone get enough bread here in this desolate place to feed these people?"**

Really? As readers, it's so easy to think, "Guys, this is a no-brainer. Obviously Jesus will do what He did before." Our *brains* think that when it's not *our* situation. But our hearts have such a hard time trusting the Lord to be faithful, don't they? It's not just the 12 and it's not just us. Even David struggled with this mentality. In 1 Samuel 27, David said to himself, "One of these days I'll be swept away by Saul."<sup>4</sup> No you won't. Of *course* you won't! Because God *loves* you and He's *promised* to you and He has a great plan for your life. But the human heart is prone to wander, quick to doubt.

But the disciples are in a period and pattern of hard-heartedness. Even with all they've seen and heard. Even though they were up close and personal, they *still* were able to make these mental and spiritual mistakes because their *hearts* were rigid. And so, the 12 say, "No one has enough to feed these people." David Garland writes, "They do not yet realize that even with their scanty supplies, they have in Jesus enough to feed the entire world."<sup>5</sup>

Resources aren't the decider. Difficulty isn't the deciding factor. The God of the universe decides. In *our* lives, when a problem or opportunity arises, the first attention should *not* go to the difficulty or the resources, but simply to the Lord. Our first question should be, "Lord, what should we do?"

**Mark 8:5-10 - <sup>5</sup> "How many loaves do you have?" he asked them. "Seven," they said. <sup>6</sup> He commanded the crowd to sit down on the ground. Taking the seven loaves, he gave thanks, broke them, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people. So they served them to the crowd. <sup>7</sup> They also had a few small fish, and after he had blessed them, he said these were to be served as well. <sup>8</sup> They ate and were satisfied. Then they collected seven large baskets of leftover pieces. <sup>9</sup> About four thousand were there. He dismissed them. <sup>10</sup> And he immediately got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.**

This would've been interesting because, under the ceremonial laws, Jews weren't allowed to eat with Gentiles. Now here are the disciples serving them dinner. Once again they are brought face-to-face with the reality that God did *not* hate Gentiles, but loved them just as He loved Jews.

The baskets spoken of here weren't the small, lunch-box style we've seen before. These are more like hampers. In Acts 9, this kind of basket is large enough for a grown man to fit in.<sup>6</sup> Lots of food.

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<sup>4</sup> 1 Samuel 27:1

<sup>5</sup> David Garland *The NIV Application Commentary: Mark*

<sup>6</sup> R.T. France *The Gospel Of Mark*

**Mark 8:11 - <sup>11</sup> The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, demanding of him a sign from heaven to test him.**

How many proofs would be enough? Give us a sign. You mean like healing the blind? Cleansing lepers? Raising the dead? How about God the Father speaking from heaven at His baptism?

In your life there are going to be unbelievers who just *won't* believe. It's not about proof. They're like the children of Israel in Exodus 32. They're at Mount Sinai. The glory cloud is thundering on the mountain. *There it is!* And they say to Aaron, "Make us gods who will go before us."

When you talk with unbelievers, be gracious, be patient, be clear in sharing the truth of Jesus. But the reality is that *some* of them have no interest in being convinced or hearing answers. Some of them just want to argue and tear down. Especially when we're talking about online "discussions."

For these Pharisees, it was never really about proof. They saw all the miracles and said, "Well, He does them by the power of the Devil." They *would not* believe. No matter what. They *would not* listen to God, Who was revealing the truth of the Messiah to them, again and again. But Jesus explained in John 8 that the real issue was *not* that they weren't totally convinced. It was that they belonged to the Devil. He said, "You are of your father, the Devil."<sup>7</sup> And they're proving it right here.

Our text says they were trying to *test* Him. In *my* mind that conjures the idea of really trying to verify. But the same word used here was used of the devil *tempting* Jesus back in Mark 1.<sup>8</sup> This Pharisee interaction was a satanic attack on the Lord, and He was not going to play the game.

**Mark 8:12-13 - <sup>12</sup> Sighing deeply in his spirit, he said, "Why does this generation demand a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to this generation." <sup>13</sup> Then he left them, got back into the boat, and went to the other side.**

This is the second time we've seen Jesus sigh like this. This time it was an intensified version.<sup>9</sup> The attitude of these unbelievers produced a *visceral* expression of grief from deep within Jesus' heart.

And they had no excuse. Jesus is the *proven* Christ by word, by work, and by witnesses. God does not need to write a message in the skies. All the proof has been - and continues to be - entered into the record of human history. His infallible word is accessible to nearly every person on the planet. His work continues around the globe, around the clock. And He sends us out to be true witnesses of His grace, His power, His ability, His truth, His goodness. *And* the heavens declare His glory!

**Mark 8:14 - <sup>14</sup> The disciples had forgotten to take bread and had only one loaf with them in the boat.**

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<sup>7</sup> John 8:44

<sup>8</sup> Gaebelein

<sup>9</sup> France

So here's the moment: The disciples forget to pack bread. Not a big deal, but the situation is going to uncover a real problem - a *heart* problem. But this *is* pretty embarrassing considering *how much* they had at their disposal just a few verses ago. Huge baskets of supply. But they left it behind.

In the Bible, God explains to us all the things He supplies us with. His peace, *given* to us. His joy. His wisdom. His strength to endure. His way out of temptation. But so often as we live life, we set sail leaving all those baskets on the shore. We find ourselves angry or bitter or burned out or overcome by temptation or fearful or confused. And *all* of those things have been addressed by God and addressed *specifically* so we can be lifted up *above* the earthly problems and live a supernatural life. But we won't be spiritually nourished if we leave it all behind and just row in our own strength. We'll come to the end of our reserves long before we reach the other side.

Instead of leaving them behind, God's word urges us to *use* those gifts. Through these great and precious promises we share in the divine nature and escape the corruption of the world.<sup>10</sup>

**Mark 8:15-16 - <sup>15</sup> Then he gave them strict orders: "Watch out! Beware of the leaven, of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." <sup>16</sup> They were discussing among themselves that they did not have any bread.**

Jesus often uses current situations to teach us eternal truths. He hears them talking about the bread and He uses that to try to warn them about dangerous influences that will try to worm their way into a disciple's heart. He uses a physical situation to teach them about living the spiritual life.

Leaven, by the way, is not exactly the same as yeast. In fact, yeast was rare in antiquity.<sup>11</sup> Leaven is a synonym for corruption. Jesus is saying here, "Watch out that these influences don't corrupt your life." First, the leaven of the Pharisees. In Luke, Jesus says the leaven of the Pharisees is hypocrisy. They *claimed* to be righteous while in reality dishonoring God. In Matthew, the leaven of the Pharisees is their false teaching. The idea that rules and rituals make you right with God. Legalism.

What was Herod's leaven? Well, Herod was all about self. He was all about license and wealth and power and pleasure. And around him there was a group called the Herodians. These were Jews who saw Herod's rule as a way to get political power.

So, you have legalism on one side and license on the other. You have the corrupting influence of self-righteousness and the corrupting influence of self-indulgence. And Jesus says, "Hey, *watch out* for this stuff. Because a *little bit* of either will spread through your life and change the whole composition of who you are."

These are viruses that *really can* infect us. You get to Acts and you see that *in the church* there is a whole group who call themselves "The party of the Pharisees." When we look at the church in

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<sup>10</sup> 2 Peter 1:4

<sup>11</sup> Witherington

Corinth, we see they're deep into license and self-indulgence - the leaven of Herod. So we need to take this warning to heart. The problem is, the disciples' hearts were hard.

**Mark 8:17-21** - <sup>17</sup> **Aware of this, he said to them, "Why are you discussing the fact you have no bread? Don't you understand or comprehend? Do you have hardened hearts? <sup>18</sup> Do you have eyes and not see; do you have ears and not hear?, And do you not remember? <sup>19</sup> When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of leftovers did you collect?" "Twelve," they told him. <sup>20</sup> "When I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many baskets full of pieces did you collect?" "Seven," they said. <sup>21</sup> And he said to them, "Don't you understand yet?"**

So, Jesus gives this warning and, apparently, the disciples immediately disregard and even *ignore* what He said.<sup>12</sup> They didn't understand, so they just moved on to the thing *they* were concerned about: Whose fault was it that they only had one loaf of bread. Well, first of all, it's *all* of their faults and second, *the number of loaves didn't matter* when the Bread of Life is in the boat with you!

They were focused on the situational difficulty - we're gonna need bread - while Jesus was trying to get them to think about the spiritual dangers that are ever present in the world. Spiritually deaf ears are a way worse problem than physically hungry stomachs.

But where they needed sensitivity, there was stiffness. The disciples were in a pattern of hard-heartedness in this section of Mark. The Pharisees were absolutely deaf, spiritually speaking, but the disciples found themselves not far behind. And they reveal here that they *also* had a mostly superficial perspective on Jesus' work and wonders.<sup>13</sup> Shown in those moments where they're saying, "Who among us is the greatest?" Or, "Can we sit at Your right hand in the Kingdom," and "Can we call down fire on these guys we don't like?"

Those questions reveal a total misunderstanding of the teaching and work of Jesus Christ. It wasn't about loaves of bread. It wasn't about earthly prestige. It wasn't about political dominance. It was about *new life*. A new way of life where our minds are set *above*, not on earthly things.

The good news was that there was still hope for 11 of these 12 guys. Don't you understand yet? Seeing the risen Christ and experiencing Pentecost, they would finally start to grasp the spiritual realities Jesus wanted to teach them. Not perfectly. They still had a ways to go even *decades* after this moment. So do we. But as we go, here's the encouragement: We don't need to worry about what we bring in the boat. Christ is enough for every situation. And in every situation there is a spiritual reality God wants to teach us. As we walk with Him, let's not forget to pack tender hearts, listening ears, open eyes, a submitted mind so that we are continually shaped and influenced by *Him*, not the corrupting agents of the world around us.

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<sup>12</sup> Morna Hooker *The Gospel According To Saint Mark*

<sup>13</sup> France