

I love hearing different people's testimonies. To me, **nobody's** testimony, is **ever** boring. A testimony is somebody's story about what happened (what was the process?), that led that person to first, **believe** in Jesus Christ, and then to become a **disciple** of Jesus ...

Now, for some people, it was an instantaneous thing, where all of a sudden, God revealed Himself to them in some way: through the Scriptures; or through a preacher; or evangelist; or some other way,,, – All of a sudden, their **eyes** were opened, they **believed** in Jesus, they repented of their sins, and they handed control of their life over to Jesus, because they knew Jesus is Lord...

But for others, it's been a process that's taken years or maybe even decades, where God keeps touching their life at various times, and the whole time, God is drawing them to Himself; and He's **revealing** Himself to them,,,,, but throughout the whole process, their heart remains hardened, and they just don't see...

But gradually , over months, years and decades, they begin to see, and they begin to see more clearly, until finally, their eyes are opened, and they 'get it'.

You know, when Jesus called His first disciples, **straight away**, they dropped everything to follow Him... And we might go "There you go – they're an example of 'instantaneous believers'" – No, they weren't...

It took a long time for them to see clearly. In fact, it wasn't until Jesus had been raised from the dead, that their eyes were fully opened, and they could finally see clearly, who this Jesus bloke really was, that they'd been following for the last few years...

Today, we're about half way through the pages of Gospel of Mark: but in terms of its timeline, at this point in the Gospel, Jesus has been with the disciples for years, and it's only a matter of months now, until He's crucified... That's the way the Gospel is written. It goes really fast at the start, and then it slows down. So far, it's been a bit like this:

- immediately Jesus went here;
- immediately Jesus went there;
- immediately this happened;
- immediately that happened...

One verse He's this side of the lake; next verse, He's travelled for days, and in an entirely different spot...

But from here-on-in, the Gospel of Mark begins to slows down, as Jesus journeys to Jerusalem; He's put on trial; and He's crucified...

Alright, so we're this far in to the Gospel – only a matter of months now, until the Passover and the crucifixion,,,, and the disciples don't even know who Jesus is... Does that matter? Too right it matters...

We cannot become true disciples of Jesus, until we know who Jesus really is. If Jesus was just a man (all-be-it: a good man)

– If Jesus was just a nice man who was executed by those nasty people who held the power,,,,, the story of Jesus would simply be the story of a martyr for a cause... – the story of someone who’s death resulted in an ideal, that we too could follow if we feel like it... And so it becomes a matter of preference...

But the fact that Jesus is the Christ – the Son of God, well that changes everything... Why would we submit ourselves (even unto death) to a human who died a couple of thousand years ago??? There’d be no point... But the fact that Jesus lives – the fact that **we** are merely human, and **Jesus** is divine (Jesus is God) – that changes everything... We can have every confidence in Jesus as Lord – not just by name (not just as a title) – but “Lord” in the true sense of the word...

We can trust Jesus:

- with our life;
- with our death;
- with our present;
- with our future;
- with our eternity;

Because:

- He is the one who holds eternity in His hands.
- He’s the one who **has** all power; and
- all authority;
- He’s the one who controls all things;
- He’s the one who judges the wicked & the faithless; and
- gives life to the faithful...

And because He is all this, **and** He is Just; and Loving; and kind; and merciful,,,, – Because He is God – King of Kings – Lord of Lords – that’s why we willingly give our very lives to

Him, to be our Lord – He’s our everything... We’re not making Him something that He is **not** – He already **is** Lord – we just acknowledge this...

Righto:

Today in chapter 8, Jesus feeds the 4000.... It’s not so long ago, we read the account where He fed the 5000... With the feeding of the 5000, He had compassion on the crowds, because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and so He taught them...

With the feeding of the 4000, He’d been teaching them for 3 days... (You think my sermons are long...) But you know what: When you love Jesus, and you love His word, if the Holy Spirit is in the teaching, a long sermon isn’t long at all...

With the advent of “Netflix” and other streaming services, there’s a new thing called “binge-watching”, where a TV series that’s been recorded, with the intention of it being watched over a season, is all available at once, and so people sit down and watch 3 or 4, or even more episodes, one after the other – they just can’t get enough... Binge-watching...

Now, this might be a new thing for television viewers, but craving **spiritual** teaching, isn’t a new thing at all...

There were days when I used to spend 12 or 14 hours on a tractor, (and this is going to date me), I would listen to cassettes (My Mum used to get David Pawson [Pommy preacher] audio cassettes mailed to her, and I would take boxes full of them, out on the tractor) and I would just devour

them... They would usually be a teaching series on a book of the Bible (12 cassettes, 45min a piece), and I'd listen to all of them in one day...

Some people told me they've done the same thing, with a BD podcast – just listen to it while they drive the car, or driving the tractor... If you want to binge-watch it on TV, you can do a search on Vimeo, (you can even watch it on your apple TV if you like)...

When God gives you a hunger, to hear His word, and there's Holy Spirit-inspired teaching available, you can listen to it for hours, and not get sick of it...

And that's what the crowds did – they listened to Jesus for 3 days. And so He had compassion on them because they were hungry, some of them were a long way from home, and He was worried they'd faint on the way...

And His disciples say, “Well, what do you want **us** to do about it???” - it was like they'd forgotten the feeding of the 5000... Jesus wasn't a one-hit-wonder... So, they pretty much replay it again: How many loaves have you got? 7.

- He gets the crowds to sit down;
- blesses the bread and the fish;
- they distribute the food;
- everyone eats as much as they can;
- they gather up the left-overs;
- 7 baskets full

¹⁰ And **immediately** he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.

Pop-quiz: What famous miracle of Jesus is the district of Dalmanutha remembered for?

Anyone know??? Can't think of anything??? Good answer...
Nothing...

What happened in Dalmanutha?

^{v11} The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him.

Isn't that so typical...? Jesus has been giving signs left, right & centre... But that's not enough for the Pharisees – they wanted to see a sign...

And don't so many people demand that today??? If God wants me to believe in Him, all He has to do is give me a sign – then I'll believe... No you won't!!!

Sign-seeking is the **opposite** of faith... If I was trying to use more 'academic' language, I'd say "Sign-seeking is the **antithesis** of faith"... It's only the hard-hearted who demand another sign...

The "heard-hearted", are those who refuse to see – it's those who, even when the evidence is before them, they refuse to accept it... In fact, they'll believe almost **any** alternative, rather than believing the simple God-honest truth ...

BTW, when the Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign from heaven to test him, this was another temptation for Jesus.... The Greek word used here for “test” (they did it to test Him), is the same Greek word for when Satan tested Jesus in the wilderness – it was a temptation...

And many people today might have the attitude, *“If God wants me to believe in Him, all He has to do is give me a sign – it’s that simple...”* But it’s not that simple, because that sort of belief isn’t faith... God wants us to respond in faith...

And when they asked for another sign from heaven, Jesus' response, was almost a response of exasperation: Jesus **sighed deeply in his spirit ...**

You know: When Jesus healed the deaf and dumb man, He sighed – it was a big job – a difficult thing, but not so hard for Jesus...

But this was an even bigger job – He didn’t just sigh – He sighed deeply...

“Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation.”

¹³ And he left them, got into the boat again, and went to the other side.

No point asking for another sign... There’s already enough evidence of God working in this world, and God working in the hearts of His children... Don’t ask for another sign – you’re not getting one. What it takes, is “faith”...

Let's move on:

Have you ever noticed that when you have a guilty conscience, you see references to what your conscience is troubling you about, even when that's not at all the intent... E.g. You might be sitting in church, listening to the sermon, and it feels like that dastardly preacher's preaching right at ya... And you go, "How does he even know about that?" How does he even know about this issue that I'm struggling with???"

Well, I'll let you in on a little secret: – the preacher doesn't know about it... There's been times that someone's come up to me after church, and said, "Wow, how did you know???" This is the issue that I've been dealing with, and your message just spoke direct at me..” And I assure them, “No, it's not me, and it's not my message – if there's anything good that's come out of this, it's God who's done it, and I'm left, thinking to myself, “How could they have even got that out of that sermon? That's not at all what I was talking about...”

Well, something like that, happened here:

It must've been the disciples responsibility to re-stock the bread supply before their boat trip, and they obviously never got around to it...

And they're out on the water, and Jesus says:

"Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod."

And the disciples go “Leaven – yeast – bread – Oh!!! We forgot the bread, and now He knows about it.... Dohhh!!!!

And Jesus is there: “What are you going on about???” Why are you lot worried about forgetting the bread??? Don’t you get it yet???

Are your hearts hardened? ¹⁸ Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear?

- They’d seen the feeding of the 5000.
- They’d seen the feeding of the 4000
- They’re the ones who’d gathered up the left-overs afterwards....

And they’re still worried about bread... If they truly knew who it was, who was in the boat with them, they wouldn’t be worried about bread...

So, if He wasn’t talking about their forgetting to bring the bread, what did Jesus mean when He said “**beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.**”

It seems ‘strange’, that He would even lump these 2 groups together. The Pharisees were the religious purity movement, with all of their strict ceremonial and purity rules and regulations; and they hated the Romans...

Whereas Herod was the puppet king of the Romans – essentially he was a collaborator; and Herod and his followers (the Herodians), were all about political power, and

personal indulgences and licentious living... - almost the exact opposites...

What was the **leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod**. What did they have in common?

Leaven, was that little bit of old, mouldy dough, that you mixed in with a new batch of dough, and that's what made it rise...

And Biblically, leaven was a symbol for a little bit of evil, that if left unchecked, it had the potential to mix through, and infect a whole community... It's a "pervasive influence", that could turn a whole community rotten...

And the Pharisees and the Herodians had 2 things in common???

1. They both demanded a sign... The Pharisees tried to tempt Jesus, "Give us a sign". And in Luke 23, we're told that when Jesus was on trial, and sent before Herod, Herod was very glad, because he'd heard about this Jesus bloke, and for a long time, he wanted to see Him do a sign... It was like he wanted to be entertained by Jesus...
2. And the second thing they had in common, was both groups (together) secretly plotted to have Jesus destroyed¹...

These blokes were so false... They didn't want a sign at all... Here they are in Chapter 8, asking for a sign, when back in

chapter 3, they've already come up with a plan to destroy Jesus...

And Jesus is saying, "watch out for people like that"...

And that's a warning for us too: Watch out for those who pretend to have an interest, but their secret intent is to tear down Christ, and His disciples...

Beware of a false-teacher who brings strange ideas in to a church... Don't tolerate untruth; Don't tolerate even a subtle modification of God's word... it can become a leaven – something that pervades throughout a whole community... It's happening in the Christian church today... A few little lies get introduced – a new little heresy: and after a while people get used to it, and eventually it becomes the accepted norm....

Watch out for those who seem to be showing interest, but secretly, they have an agenda, to destroy God's church... That's what He was saying.

Righto, so they've had this discussion in the boat: Jesus is saying, "Don't you get it yet?"

18 **Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear?** Alright, He's talking about spiritual deafness and spiritual blindness:

And when they arrive at Bethsaida, a **physically** blind man is brought to Jesus, for Him to heal... and this is what happens:

- Jesus takes him by the hand, and leads him out of the village; and
- Jesus spat in his eyes, (not normal ophthalmologist practice today); and
- He laid His hands on them;
- “Do you see anything”
- And he looked up... “I can see people, but they’re not real clear – they look like trees walking”
- Then Jesus laid His hands on his eyes again;
- And this time, he **opened his eyes wide**,
- And his sight was restored;
- and he saw **everything** clearly

What’s going on here? Was this an example of how God doesn’t always give immediate healing, and that sometimes it takes time – Sometimes healing is a gradual thing – Is that the lesson? Maybe...

Or was it a lesson that we should never be content with a half-answered prayer??? – Don’t give up praying if the prayer isn’t fully answered??? Maybe...

You know what I see here??? I see, a lovely example of a physical healing that Jesus did (He made the blind man to see),,, and this event, is like a parable... What Jesus did physically with this blind man, is like an example of what’s going on **spiritually** in the disciples...

The first time the blind man opened his eyes, we're told that he looked up, and he could see, but it was all blurry... The second time (in the Greek), it actually says (this time), **he opened His eyes wide**ⁱⁱ... the NRSV tells us that (this time) **he looked intently**...

Are you getting this??? The first time, he had a bit of a look, and he saw a little bit, but it wasn't clear... He could see stuff going on – he could see movement, so it must be people moving,, but it looks like trees walking around...

The second time, he had a proper look...

Let me give you a little glimpse into the home-life of the Brumptons:

- *Robyn, I can't find my keys...*
- *Have you looked for them?*
- *Yes. I've been looking for them for the last half hour...*
- *Where did you leave them?*
- *I've looked there, and they're not there. You must've shifted them somewhere...*

- *And so Michael's had a "Michael look", and he can't find them...*
- *And Robyn comes out, and in 30 seconds she's looked in a few of the same places that Michael looked, and she says "What are these?"*
- *Where'd you find them?*
- *On the kitchen bench.*
- *I looked on the kitchen bench...*

BTW, that's a common occurrence in our house... I look, but sometimes my keys are completely invisible to me... It's a mystery...

And here, the blind man looked, but he didn't have a proper look. The second time round, he opened his eyes wide – he looked intently... And everything was clear...

And this is a very practical example of what's going on in the disciples spiritually. The disciples have been hanging out with Jesus for years now, and they were starting to see a little bit, but they're not looking properly; their hearts are hard; And it's not clear to them, who Jesus really is.

Thankfully, Jesus **didn't** give up on them.

Next week, we get to where Jesus asks, "Who do you say I am?"

And Peter says, "You're the Christ"....

Only gradually do they see, and it's only when Jesus is raised from the dead, that their eyes are fully opened, and they can see everything...

So, let's come back to where we began: sometimes it takes years, or decades for someone to fully open their eyes, and see Jesus clearly... They know there's something in this Jesus thing, but they just don't get it...

Let's not mess around with trying to avoid offending anyone... Jesus came right out with it: When His disciples were slow to see,,,,, the root cause of their slowness to 'get it', was their hardened hearts, and Jesus named that... They had eyes, but they weren't seeing... They understood a bit about Jesus, but they still weren't getting it...

A hardened heart will have a bit of a cursory look at Jesus, but it will continue to see what **it** wants to see...

A hardened heart, is a very real barrier to faith, because it tries to shape Jesus into **our** view of what **we** want Him to **be**...

But a softened heart – a heart of faith, is when we open our eyes, and look intently. It's when we see God for who God truly is... We need to stop imagining what we want Jesus to be, and we have to start seeing Him for who He really is... Have a proper look... Have a proper look, through eyes of faith...

See who Jesus is, for real – the King of Kings and Lord of Lords... And believe...

Questions:

ⁱ Mark 3:⁶ The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

Sentence: Stop imagining what we want Jesus to be, and start seeing Him for Who He truly is.

Scripture: Mark 8:1-30

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