

Following the Good News about Jesus, ICB 2011
The Gospel of Mark, Chapters 1-8
“For Further Reflection”
Manuscript Study
May 8 2011
(2 pages)

From Mark 8:1-21

Title: “Lord, Don’t Let Our Hearts be Hardened toward You”

Focus of Message from this Section

The message focused on the meaning of two questions Jesus asked of his disciples. He asked them, “Are your hearts hardened?” and “Do you still not understand?” In order to get at his meaning, we observed some of the details of the text as well as seven angles that would help us understand what Jesus meant by these questions.

The seven angles we considered included the following:

- Angle One: Jesus call to his disciples to share his ministry with his authority (see 1:16-20; 3:13-15; 6:6-13). The disciples did not yet understand their part in Jesus ministry.
- Angle Two: Jesus wanted the disciples to see and share his compassion for the Gentiles (see Matthew 15:21-25 and note that disciples never considered that this Gentile woman deserved Christ’s compassion). The disciples were as yet hardened to this great mystery of the gospel; that is, in Jesus eyes, not one of us is better than another but all are in need of his mercy.
- Angle Three: Jesus understanding of the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod –Note that this leaven was more than simply unbelief; as leaven grows, so would grow the hostility of these groups to Jesus AND to the disciples (see Mark 13:9-11). The disciples failed to grasp that persecution would be part of Jesus calling and their own; we too can fail to understand this?
- Angle Four: What about the bread? It is clear that Jesus wanted the disciples to realize that he is the bread of life who cares for the smallest details of our lives while caring for our deepest eternal need for his life-giving bread; in contrast, the disciples were blaming one another over this matter of who forgot the bread. We too can become hardened by such small worries and fail to understand Jesus larger concerns.
- Angle Five: The theme of fear is big in the gospel of Mark: John Mark had fear (see 14:51-52), Peter had fear, the Gospel ends with fear (see 16:8), and the Christians in Rome to whom gospel written faced fear. We too can become hardened by such fear.
- Angle Six: The Gospel of Mark is the “beginning,” not the end of the gospel; remember Mark’s words, “the beginning of the good news about Jesus. . . “Jesus still has work to do in the disciples and in us until his 2nd coming. We too have more areas of our lives where we need to understand Jesus better.

- Angle Seven: The call of the disciple is one of great cost (see 8:35). We can fail to understand this call of the disciple.

In light of these observations and angles, I suggested that what Jesus meant by these questions is exactly what he meant. As we face the challenges in our life suggested by these seven angles, there are many times he might ask of us, “Are your hearts hardened?” “Do you still not understand?” Often, we might answer, “Yes, Lord, my heart is hardened in this area.” “No Lord, I do not understand you in this.” If we are honest, we might often pray, “Lord, don’t let our hearts be hardened toward you!!!”

For Further Reflection

1. Compare and contrast the feeding of the 5,000 (6:30-44) with the feeding of the 4,000 (8:1-13). What indicators of growth do you see in the disciples? What do you learn about Jesus?
2. After arriving on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, in a region ruled by Herod, Jesus is met by the Pharisees who want to test him (8:11-13). How might Jesus encounter with these Pharisees have influenced what he says to his disciples, “Be careful. Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod?” How does his concern contrast with the disciples’ concern over bread (8:14-17)?
3. As you look at the questions Jesus asked of his disciples in light of the seven angles we consider, what questions or comments do you have?
4. **What other good news about Jesus have you come to see from this section?**