

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Sermon title: The Pharisees Demand a Sign, Mark 8

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SCRIPTURE: Mark 8:1-13 *During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, ² “I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. ³ If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance.”*

⁴ *His disciples answered, “But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?”*

⁵ *“How many loaves do you have?” Jesus asked.*

“Seven,” they replied.

⁶ *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. ⁷ They had a few small fish as well; he gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them. ⁸ The people ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ⁹ About four thousand were present. After he had sent them away, ¹⁰ he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha.*

¹¹ *The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven. ¹² He sighed deeply and said, “Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to it.” ¹³ Then he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side.*

INTRODUCTION: There are several points I want you to consider today:

1. The Pharisees wanted a sign, not a Savior.
2. Jesus knew the Pharisees would never be satisfied.

3. Signs from Jesus are secondary to experiencing Jesus.
4. We must have faith in the signs already recorded in the Bible.

First, THE PHARISEES WANTED A SIGN, NOT A SAVIOR.

The Pharisees wanted some kind of sign from heaven. What kind of sign were they looking for? As men who had much of the Scripture memorized, they would have known the following signs from heaven recorded in Scripture:

- Noah – God’s promise of the rainbow
- Ten plagues of Egypt – including fiery hail and darkness
- Israelites – pillar of clouds by day and a pillar of fire by night
- Israelites – manna and quail that fell from heaven
- Elijah - fire out of heaven
- Fire and brimstone that came down on Sodom and Gomorrah

And there are other signs from the heavens I did not mention.

As I’ve told you, when crowds were counted in this day, traditionally only the men were counted. With women and children, the crowd could have been over 10,000. We really don’t know. The interesting thing here is that Jesus feed well over 4,000 people with seven loaves and a few fish. However, the Pharisees asked for a sign. What more of a sign did they need?

By now, according to the book of Mark, Jesus had already worked miracles. However, to the Pharisees, apparently a miracle was not a sign from heaven.

Listen to what I am saying here; let’s learn from the Pharisees’ mistake. Let’s not look for a sign; let’s look for a Savior. It’s possible someone listening today has been praying for a sign – some type of sign from heaven – some type of sign to show you that Jesus truly is the Savior. Let me be clear: God can provide the sign if he wants to provide one, but he is under no obligation to do so.

Even today, we want him to show us some kind of sign.

Let's review:

- The Pharisees wanted a sign, not a Savior, and next...

Second, JESUS KNEW THE PHARISEES WOULD NEVER BE SATISFIED.

Jesus already had experience with this sarcastic club of men. Not only were they unconvinced when Jesus worked the miracle of feeding the crowd, but they were convinced not with unconvinced with any miracle he had performed prior.

The Pharisees are the premier case study of living in denial. Even if they had told Jesus the sign they needed to believe was the feeding of the 8,000, and if he had done it, they would have asked him to show them an even greater sign— feeding 16,000. With these guys, the criticism never stopped.

As men of the Scripture, they would have known the prophecies concerning the Messiah. They would have known about Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, about his travel to Egypt, and about how other things regarding Jesus coincided with Scripture. But, to them, it was merely coincidental. He didn't fit the image of the Messiah they wanted, and even more, he refused to provide a sign. So, therefore, they refused to believe.

How do we come to terms with Jesus' denial to provide a sign while men of the Old Testament, in fact, requested signs?

Abraham asked for a sign. God provided one.

Gideon asked for a sign. God provided one. And, from this story, we get the common statement about putting out a fleece.

Matthew Henry, a commentator who lived in the late 1600s into the 1700s said, "Signs were granted to those who desired them for the confirmation of their faith, as to Abraham and Gideon; but were denied to those who demanded them for the excuse their unbelief."

A missionary couple I met told me they thought the Lord was calling them into full time missionary service, but they knew it would be difficult to sell their home. They prayed for a sign as to whether God was calling them, and one day in the mail, they got a letter from the state claiming imminent domain on their property because a highway was planned right where their home stood. Well, the Lord answered their prayer with not only a provision to sell their home to the state, but with no choice but to move.

This is different than the Pharisees demanding to see a sign. The Pharisees saw Jesus as an entertaining side show, not as a Savior. They merely demanded a sign to excuse their unbelief.

Let's review:

- The Pharisees wanted a sign, not a Savior.
- Jesus knew the Pharisees would never be satisfied

And, Third, SIGNS FROM JESUS ARE SECONDARY TO EXPERIENCING JESUS.

A sign is something which happens at a given time, and then it is gone. Elijah called fire out of heaven, and later it was gone. As the weeks and months passed, the altar where Elijah called fire out of heaven crumbled away, and today we only have the recorded story.

Two weeks ago, I told you how Jesus told many people not to tell others about the healings and miracles because he didn't want these things to become all that people knew him for. He came to be the Savior; he came to provide a new way to come to God.

Even today, people look for signs and wonders. I have talked with a few curious seekers who are more interested about speaking in tongues than they are about experiencing God's grace every day.

SCRIPTURE: I Corinthians 1:22-24 ²² *Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom,* ²³ *but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,* ²⁴ *but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

So, let's review:

- The Pharisees wanted a sign, not a Savior.
- Jesus knew the Pharisees would never be satisfied.
- Signs from Jesus are secondary to experiencing Jesus.

And Lastly, WE MUST HAVE FAITH IN THE SIGNS ALREADY RECORDED IN THE BIBLE.

The Pharisees weren't looking for anything life-changing. They had worked too hard to get where they were in life. Becoming a follower of Jesus Christ would have been way too humbling for them.

Had they gotten their wish, and Jesus had given them the sign from heaven of their choice, it would have only been an event. For the Pharisees, it would not have been life changing.

Today and for many, many generations, we have had the Biblical record of signs already provided by the Lord. When he was on earth, he did even more than what's been recorded. John 21:25 says *"Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written."*

Do we look at the records from American history and ask for a sign these records are actually true? Think of the absurdity of asking God to provide a sign that there was really a Continental Congress and a Revolutionary War. How about other things in history...let's go back to the time of Christ. Anyone ever asked for a sign from God that the history of the known world is actually recorded as it was in today's history books? No. We believe it was based on recorded eye-witness accounts. We trust the passing-on of information from earlier generations.

With that being said, then why would any of us ask for a sign from God to prove that he is real when we have the Biblical record? Why not just believe by faith and not ask for a sign?

If you need to find that Savior today, the Scripture declares that Jesus is the Savior. You don't need a sign.

ILLUSTRATION: Several months back, a man came here to be baptized. That man was putting his former religion aside. A group of people assembled right here to question him in his own language about his sincerity. I kind of felt sorry for the man because the interrogation seemed rough. He reached a point of frustration, and then he exclaimed, “The religion I was raised in is false. Jesus is real. Jesus is my Savior, and only Jesus has the power to forgive sin. And I want to be baptized right now.” You see, that man did not need a sign, he needed a Savior.

After talking with the Pharisees, Jesus debriefed his disciples. Read what he said in verse 14.

SCRIPTURE: Mark 8: 14-15 ¹⁴ *The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat.* ¹⁵ *“Be careful,” Jesus warned them. “Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod.”*

EXPLANATION: To me, this is the humorous part of the story. Jesus had just fed 4,000 people, and a week or so before that, he had fed 5,000 people. Yet the disciples were worried about food. Jesus was with them on the boat, and there was no need to worry about food. If Jesus is with you in the desert, there is no reason to worry about food. But, they were worried about food, and Jesus gave them a warning. He must have been exasperated. The disciples had been with him all this time, and now their level of understanding had been proven weak and not really much stronger than that of the Pharisees. But aren't we a lot like the disciples? Aren't we quick to forget our blessings? Aren't we?

But, with Jesus with us—why do we worry about anything?

In Galatians 5, the leavening of bread is used as a picture of false doctrine (Galatians 5:9). Jesus said *watch out for the yeast*. In I Corinthians, it's used to describe not-yet-judged sin. We are told to get rid of the “old yeast” which corrupts the batch (1 Corinthians 5:7). Jesus used leavening as an illustration of hypocrisy.

SCRIPTURE: Mark 7:6 *Jesus replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about the hypocrites. As it is written, ‘these people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.’”*

Jesus also used leaven here at the same time he mentioned King Herod. King Herod was an enemy of the cross. Some people of his day actually believed Herod's rule would bring in the promised kingdom for the Jewish people, and Jesus warned the disciples about the yeast, such as this false doctrine. Although so small, it can infiltrate the whole batch of dough.

I guess the negativity and the criticism of the Pharisees had worn off a little bit on the disciples. And Jesus took this as an opportunity to provide some correction and instruction.

SUMMARY: Now, where does this sermon leave us today?

Asking for a sign from God should only come when you have faith in Jesus. It should come as something which provides you direction and confirmation in the faith you already have.

Next, asking for a sign should not come as a reason to excuse your un-belief. If you ask the Lord for a sign, please remember— he is under no obligation to provide one. And if he still does not provide one, he will still hold you accountable for your decisions. And really, we don't need a sign because we've got the written record of the signs already provided. We've got all the wisdom and guidance that we need, and really, this should be enough for us. Right here! (Holding up the Bible)

In Luke Chapter Sixteen, Verse 31, Jesus said, "*Some people would not believe even if a person rose from the dead.*" Later on, Jesus would rise from the dead, and many still didn't believe. Someone here today needs to let go of his skepticism and let go of his justification of not becoming a follower of Jesus just because Jesus has never provided the kind of sign you want. What if he never provides it? If you are demanding a sign like the Pharisees, you're not going to get one. But, that doesn't make Jesus any less of a Savior.

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