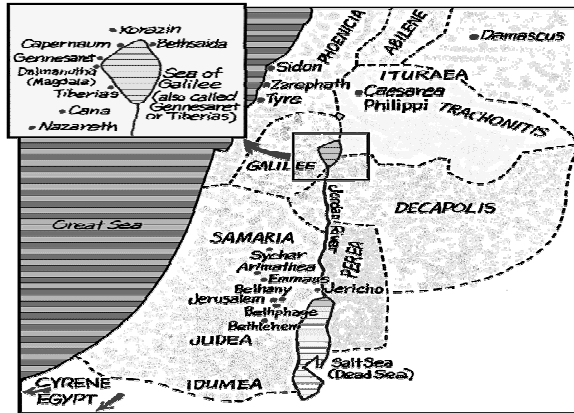


Developing a CHRISTian Worldview
 The Feeding of the Four Thousand
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Read Mark 8:1-9



I believe it is important to keep our Lord's movements in mind when reading the various stories. Jesus is in the Decapolis and is speaking to a predominately Gentile audience. It is important to remember the continued conflict with the religious leaders and political authorities. He has come to His own people first and then begins reaching out to the Gentile world. In the world in which Jesus lived, everyone who is non-Jewish is Gentile. Mark shows how Gentiles

are included in the story of God. Mark opens this idea with Jesus addressing the Pharisees on the topic of "clean versus unclean." He then heals a Canaanite woman's daughter of a demon. He continues His handling of the unclean Gentiles by healing a deaf and mute man. To show equality among the Jews and Gentiles, He repeats His feeding miracles among a predominately Gentile audience. His actions do not negate Jewish primacy. Jesus did not forget that it was to the Jew and through the Jew that God's revelation and divine incarnation would take place. Such action on His part reflects an impartial worldview. In fact, His actions always reflect a Christian worldview. Often I think as Christians we need to be reminded that a Christian worldview is a Christ worldview. His worldview is to be reflected by and represented in our worldview. It is not the other way around. Sometimes I, we, confuse our nationalism, our patriotism, our tribal instinct, our religious experience for a biblical worldview. What is His worldview? What is a Christian worldview?

- First, it is marked by racial and geographical impartiality (v. 1).
- Second, it is marked by compassion for those who suffer (v. 2).
- Third, it is marked by the naturally impossible (vv. 3-7).
- Fourth, it is marked by lavish graciousness (vv. 8-9).

For just a moment let us consider these four ideas as they are present in our passage. **First**, a Christ worldview is marked by racial and geographical impartiality (v. 1). In the historical context in which this story unfolds, I do not believe we can overstate the bitter hatred between the Jewish community and everything non-Jewish. This can be seen by noting several passages in the New Testament. The original commission of the twelve disciples by Jesus marks a distinction between the lost sheep of the house of Israel and the Gentile people (Matt. 10:5, 6).

Matthew 10:5 These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: "**Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans;** 6 but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

When speaking to the Canaanite woman with the demonic daughter our Lord refers to the non-Jew as a "dog" (Mark 7:27).

Mark 7:27 But Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread, **and to cast it unto the dogs.**

When Jesus sought to overthrow the racial and geographic bigotry of His audience, He told the unlikely (and shocking) story of The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37).

Luke 10:33 "**But a Samaritan,** who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion,

Because of His association with the unclean and Gentiles He was accused by the religious establishment of being "a man who receives sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:1, 2).

Luke 15:1 Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. 2 Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, "**This man receives sinners and eats with them.**"

When confronted by the religious establishment, He was accused of being a Samaritan and thus, "Having a demon" (John 8:48).

John 8:48 The Jews answered and said to Him, "Do we not say rightly that **You are a Samaritan and have a demon?**"

All of this clearly shows an inbred animosity existing between the Jew and the non-Jew. Although God has a love for everyone, there is little question as to God's command to terminate the people of Canaan in the Book of Joshua. We would be wrong to assume the situation in the Middle East is simply one of misunderstanding. Regardless as to the nation, if a nation seeks another nation's destruction, then the attacked nation should do what is necessary to stop the aggression. However, we would be wrong if we simply assumed that the land conquest in the Book of Joshua was because of ethnic reasons. God's love is impartial as it relates to racial or geographical qualifiers.

I will comment on this a little later, but the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10) and of Lazarus and the Rich Man (Luke 16:19) were intentionally told to take current and prevailing opinions and drop them on their head. It is not by accident we are told as "Christians" to "love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us" (Matt. 5:43). Again, such radical ideology is still difficult to completely grasp. Paul goes further and says, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse" (Rom. 12:14). Before we are Americans, we are Christians; before we are Republican or Democrat, we are Christians; before we are Bible Church, we are Christians. Being a follower of Christ dominates whatever else exists along ethnic or geographical lines.

Regardless as to whether or not a person is an American, ally or enemy; regardless as to what political party they are a part of, regardless as to whether or not they are socialists, communists, or a functional democracy, God is calling worshippers from all people groups, and we must pray for them and love them as God would.

Second, a Christ worldview is marked by compassion for those who suffer (v. 2). We have developed a significant degree of suspicion as it relates to those who are in need. As believers, it is biblical to honor those who work and bear their own burdens. It is equally true that nothing we do this side of heaven will wipe out poverty (Mark 14:7). There are those who will abuse Government programs and Christian charity, but this does not make it wrong to have compassion for those in genuine need wrong.

Our cynicism should not harden our hearts toward those in need. Jesus saw those who were without food for three days, and He was moved with compassion. Paul tells us we should be good to all men, especially those in the household of faith (Gal. 6:10). We must not allow our compassion to be defined by race or region. Many who suffer do so as a result of their poor choices. Some, however, suffer for Providential reasons. Regardless as to why, we cannot afford to become hardened toward the suffering of others. As a community of faith, I take great delight in our collective generosity as it relates to our benevolent offering. I also believe it is right for us to be involved in our community in the various services it provides for those in genuine need. We must not allow the few who misuse the system to desensitize us toward those in real need.

Third, a Christ worldview is marked by the naturally impossible (vv. 3-7). Although we live in a natural world, we are not bound by its components. You might believe such thinking is irrational, but there is another dimension that exists beyond the power of the simple eye to perceive. Our God, the God we individually and collectively profess, "Is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us" (Eph. 3:20). Our God is able to feed 5,000 plus people with five loaves and two small fish (Mark 6:34-44). He is able to feed 4,000 people with seven loaves and a few small fish (Mark 8:1-9). Our God is able to open deaf ears, loosen tied tongues, deliver the demon possessed, heal the lame, and cause the blind to see. This is the story told and preserved for us as His people. As Christians, as followers of the Christ, our hope lies forever and unchangingly in the person and work of a God who is able to do the unthinkable. He can part seas, cause water to flow from rocks, walk on it when necessary, and cause it to rain with such force as to destroy that which He creates.

Because He is all-powerful, our God is able to enable us to love our enemies and be moved by those in need. He is able to destroy our prejudices and make us just like Jesus. Because He is able, He can make from both Jew and Gentile one new man (Eph. 2:11-22). This is His mission; this is His goal.

Finally, a Christ worldview is marked by lavish graciousness (vv. 8-9). The audience that was the recipients of His miracle did not deserve what they received. In fact, just the opposite would have been true. They deserved isolation, rejection, and condemnation. But God is God and as such He is lavish in the dispensing of His gifts.

Not only was everyone fed, but they were satisfied. And not only were they satisfied, but there was excess. This lavish graciousness is also noted in our Lord's words when He said, "But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you" (Matt. 5:39-42). What we do as Christians, individually and corporately, should be markedly different than what we might do as a nation. It is impossible to be a Christian nation as it relates to a fallen world, but it is not impossible to be Christian in our response toward evil.

I cannot fully process the abundance of God's grace, but I am glad for it. In principle I can state these four thoughts and show the necessary connection between what is stated and the story before us. I can even support it with other passages. However, what I know in principle is still a genuine struggle in practice. It is my prayer that I would not seek to fit God into my presuppositions or prejudices, but would rather see Him mold my will so that my worldview is thoroughly Christ-like. May this be our collective prayer before the God whose grace is without partiality and always superabundantly dispensed.