

September 15, 2019: The most important question! [Mk. 8: 11-21]

Dear Listeners,

Wish I would get a sign from heaven; then I would believe! Have you ever thought this, dear listener? I wish something great, something spectacular would happen in my life, and show me that God truly is there! What sign, what event? Doesn't matter! As long as it shows that it's true what it says in the Bible, as long as it proves that God exists, and as long as I know that God loves me! These questions are so common, so understandable, dear listener, and it's this kind of question the Pharisees asked Jesus in the story we read in Mark chapter 8. Good question, right? Not! At least, the Lord Jesus doesn't think so, and he reacts with annoyance. Why? Why does he ignore the question and moves on in his life with the twelve disciples? Well, let's see what all had happened already that preceded this moment. That will help understand why the question isn't so good after all; no, unnecessary for you and me either!

Remember, dear listeners, how I shared with you last week the story about the sower by which the Lord Jesus taught the importance of listening. The seed of the word either falls in good soil or on a hard path, on the rocks, or among the thorns and thistles. After that the Lord Jesus travelled north, on the Sea of Galilee. That's where they end up in a storm, a frightening situation. Yet, he commands the storm to be still and the water becomes calm. Amazing! He, then, shows his power over the evil spirit in a man. These devilish powers recognized Jesus, and he sends them away. Again, the people who see this stand amazed! Then Mark also shares the story about the daughter of Jairus who had died. Jesus went there and told people that she hadn't died but was sleeping. They thought he was fooling them, yet indeed Jesus raised her from the dead! No wonder the people start wondering, "Who is this man, who has all this power, so that wind, water, demons, sickness, even death are listening to him?!"

When the Lord Jesus visits his native town of Nazareth as well, Mark shows, people there are wondering as well: isn't this the son of Joseph, the carpenter? Who is he? They didn't want to believe in him as the Saviour, the Son of God! The Lord Jesus, however, continues his work and also involves his disciples in the proclamation of the kingdom of God that's coming. His disciples as well are able to heal the sick, cast out demons, and showed the powers of the kingdom of God that's breaking through in this world! After their time of ministry, Jesus wants to give them and himself some rest. The people, however, don't let them but follow them. That's when Jesus did another mighty miracle when he multiplies five loaves of bread and two fish and feeds a crowd of some five thousand people! How is it possible! No wonder the questions multiplied themselves, "Who is this Jesus?" That's when we also read about a confrontation with the leaders of the people, the Pharisees. They may have been asking themselves the same question, and so they asked: "Show us a sign, that we may know that you're real!"

Can you imagine, dear listeners, why Jesus was annoyed when they asked this question? After all that's happened? He healed the sick, calmed the storm, raised the dead, multiplied the bread, etc. What else do they want to see or hear? Earlier already they

had slandered him insinuating that he cast out demons by the power of the devil. That sure didn't make sense, Jesus showed them. So what's their intent this time, asking him for a sign? Are they out to trap him, tackle him, or test him with ill intent again? "Truly, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation!" Jesus replied, and he left them.

Wish I would get a sign from heaven; then I would believe! Is that right? Really? Look at the people in Jesus' days, and consider all the signs they received. How did they respond; with faith? People loved the miracles and spectacular signs, but did they believe in him and recognize in him the Saviour, the Messiah? The Pharisees, the leaders, too, see all these signs and hear about all those miracles, do they believe? They're more afraid of their position, of their power over the people! Jesus, however, continues his work, keeps sowing the seed of the word, teaching and preaching that the kingdom of God had come to the earth! He even had to convince his own special group of twelve disciples of the truth of his word, of the presence of the Son of God in their midst! That's what shows when they're on their way back to Jerusalem and they are in the boat together. They had forgotten to take bread along and were wondering what to do!

The Lord Jesus listens to them as they discussed the question about the lack of bread. He responds in a straightforward, yet compassionate way, saying, "Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your ears hardened? Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember?" That's when he reminds them of the miracle of the multiplication of the bread! "Do you still not understand?" After all that they had seen and heard and after all that they had said and done? Then the Lord Jesus doesn't reject them or respond the way he did with the Pharisees, the ones who didn't want to hear or see and refused to believe. No, he continues to teach them, instruct them in order that their eyes may be opened! That they may grow and understand; that they may be able to answer the question: Who is Jesus? That's the most important question!

Who is Jesus? That question is very important for you and me too, dear listeners! What do you think of Jesus? That's an important question for people who are living in this broken world, in this world where death remains the main problem. We all have to die, and then what?! Where do you find your comfort, your answer to that most pressing reality? Then it is important to see Jesus here in the gospel according to Mark as the one who had power over many things, even over death!

You know, we can be so busy with all sorts of things, our daily chores and challenges, our questions also about life and death! We, too, could be so concerned about our daily bread, about our daily living, and our concerns regarding the many needs we have in this life? Do we then think of the way the Lord Jesus responded to all these needs? Did he not say it to you and me also, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and its righteousness, and all these things will be given to you?" He knows what we need, and he has shown that he is able to provide miraculously in all these needs! But then we should first of all answer this question: Who is Jesus? And believe in him as the Son of God in whom the Father was well-pleased! He is the Saviour, as his name denotes, who has power over life and death, and who has come to conquer sin, death, and Satan! Everyone who believes in him will be comforted in life and death for body and soul!