

Mark 8:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he said unto them, How is it that ye do not understand?

Analysis

How is it that ye do not understand? (πῶς οὐ συνίετε, pōs ou syniete)—Jesus' final question isn't rhetorical but genuinely laments their incomprehension. After recalling two miraculous feedings with specific numeric evidence (twelve baskets, seven baskets), disciples should grasp the obvious conclusion: Jesus possesses creative power to provide for all needs. Their continued anxiety about bread reveals spiritual dullness requiring divine intervention.

This verse concludes Jesus' interrogation, leaving the question hanging—Mark doesn't record the disciples' response. The silence emphasizes their shame and confusion. True understanding won't come through human reasoning but through the Spirit's illumination. The immediately following healing of a blind man (vv. 22-26) symbolizes the disciples' need for spiritual sight—a healing that occurs in stages, just as their comprehension develops gradually. Peter's confession (v. 29) demonstrates breakthrough understanding, though full clarity awaits resurrection and Pentecost.

Historical Context

Jewish teachers expected students to grasp principles through accumulated examples—Jesus provides two feeding miracles as parallel witnesses. The disciples' failure despite clear evidence reflects fallen humanity's spiritual blindness requiring regeneration. Paul later explains: 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned' (1 Corinthians 2:14). Jesus'

patience with slow disciples encouraged early Christians struggling with incomplete understanding—growth in grace is progressive, not instantaneous.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does Jesus' lament over the disciples' incomprehension demonstrate both His high expectations and patient grace toward struggling believers?
2. What does the unanswered question teach about the necessity of Spirit-wrought understanding beyond human reasoning?
3. In what areas of faith might Jesus be asking you, 'How is it that ye do not understand?' based on clear evidence He's already provided?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	ἔλεγεν	αὐτοῖς	Πῶς	οὐ	συνίετε
And	he said	unto them	How	not	is it that ye do
G2532	G3004	G846	G4459	G3756	G4920

Additional Cross-References

Mark 6:52 (Parallel theme): For they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened.