

# Chapter Five



## Mark 5:1-20

*“Grace and gratitude belong together like heaven and earth. Gratitude evokes grace like the voice and echo. Gratitude follows grace as thunder follows lightning.”*

*- Karl Barth*

In this text, the author of Mark writes about Jesus redeeming a man who has an unclean spirit. In order to understand why this man needed Christ's help, it is important for us to understand two things: 1) God is the Creator. He gave life to man whom He made in His own image. Creation and sustaining it are part of His divine character. 2) Satan is a destroyer. The devil's will is to destroy what God has created. When God brings life, Satan seeks to bring death. Verse 5 is a clear example of the devil's attempt to mutilate something God created. God also created and ordained community among men. And in verse 3 we see that the devil even attacked that by drawing him out of fellowship and into seclusion.

When Jesus encounters this man, the evil spirits in him “[cried] out with a loud voice”, and Jesus asks, “What is your name?” Surely Jesus, as the all-knowing God, would not need to ask this, so why bother asking a question that he already knew the answer to? He asks in order to teach those around him.

Hearing the demon's response was significant for Christ's followers. “My name is Legion, for we are many,” they replied. In Roman occupied Israel, the disciples would be familiar with the term “legion.” Legion is a martial unit. In the Roman Empire, a legion consisted of some six thousand soldiers. By bringing this to attention, Jesus teaches us that our enemy is not only as disciplined and organized as soldiers in an army but also capable of attacking in surprising numbers! How could this man by himself contend with an enemy who can send six thousand foes against him? For that matter, without Jesus how can we? As surely as this man needed rescue, Christ provides it for him by permitting the spirits to enter a herd of pigs. This is a pivotal moment in the story because after Christ dispels the legion from the man into the swine the audience witnesses two responses to His miraculous healing.

The first is that of the man (verse 18). Jesus heals the man, and the man responds with so much gratitude that he begs Jesus to let him travel with Him. He wants to follow Him, to go where He goes, to learn what He does and to go do it himself. Note that after Jesus heals him, He gives him a command. Instead of letting him come along He said, “Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.’ And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled.” The man didn't only respond with deep gratitude, but also with obedience to his Redeemer. Until this time Jesus did not have any

followers in Decapolis, but because of this man's obedience, the whole region heard of His works.

The second response Mark's audience observes is the response of the people. The audience is told that the people had many times attempted to bind the demonized man. They had often tried to control him because his demons were not only affecting him but were affecting those around him as well. Thus, when Jesus heals this man, he is not only bringing healing to an individual but to an entire community.

The Decapolis consisted of many outcast Jews living among Gentiles. Though pigs were considered "unclean" for the Jewish people as a whole, the pigs in this region were a source of livelihood. The herdsmen tend the pigs. The owners sell the pigs. The people eat the pigs. The pigs are central to the economy and to the people's survival. Therefore, the audience can see that the request to be dispelled into the swine was a cunning stroke by the enemy not to only kill a bunch of pigs but to attack the hearts of the people by destroying something important to them. And Jesus permitted it to happen!

Jesus wanted to challenge the people's hearts. Jesus' rescue called for them to give up something they depended on and place their trust in Him. Instead of gratitude, faith, and obedience, the people respond by asking Jesus to leave. Sure, they'd love to reap the benefits of Jesus' ministry as long as it came without a price, without sacrifice. They do not care that Jesus brought healing and redemption to the tormented man. They do not even care that Jesus brought them relief from their own oppression. The people were only concerned with what it cost them. They do not regard Him as the Messiah; they only see him as a problem. They remain focused on a bunch of dead pigs.

Mark 5:1-20 in many ways reflects the Gospel story. Jesus comes to a foreign land troubled by evil and sin. He rescues them from the grip of Satan and then gives a command to go and tell others. Therefore, it is crucial that we understand that the two possible responses present in Mark 5 are also possible for us. Jesus has saved us and shown us mercy. His salvation will always call us to sacrifice whatever we depend on that is not Him whether it is our job, our marriage, or our bank account, Jesus' intervention demands that we see Him alone as our provider. He alone is the giver and sustainer of life. His grace does not come without a call; it prompts us to respond with obedience forsaking all else for the sake of His Gospel.

### **LifeGroup Study Questions**

#### **Discussion:**

Describe what your typical day looks like.

In what ways do your daily actions and routines communicate you not only understand the Gospel but are grateful and trust in Christ' grace?

In what ways do they not?

**Understanding/Application:**

When in crisis or stress, to where, what, or who do you turn to for comfort?

What types of things are people likely to depend on (their "pigs") other than Jesus?

What are your "pigs" (What do you depend on other than Christ? What consumes your time and money?)

Are you fighting to keep your pigs alive instead of leaving them to follow Jesus?

**Further Scripture:**

Luke 14:25-33

Matthew 8:20

Philippians 1:21

Philippians 3:7-11

## Mark 5:21-43

*“All who call on God in true faith, earnestly from the heart, will certainly be heard, and will receive what they have asked and desired.”*

*-Martin Luther*

In this passage, Mark records two instances of Jesus' power to redeem and to call to faith. The first example the audience sees is in verse 25 when a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years comes to Jesus for healing. Leviticus 15:19-27 says that a woman in her position is ceremonially unclean. This means she was restricted from worshipping in the temple, offering sacrifices, and from nearly all practices of Jewish life. For twelve years, she would not have been permitted to touch people or interact in society. Her ailment made her an outcast. Her problem was embarrassing and it was surely better dealt with privately than in public.

However, her actions toward Jesus reveal a momentous approach to Jesus in faith. The typical method for cleansing and healing in her day would have been to enlist the help of physicians, prophets, and priests. To some extent she had already attempted healing in these ways but it was to no avail. However, this woman clearly believes there is something different about Jesus. She believes if she can touch Christ's garments, then she will be healed. She believes that the power to heal is in Jesus. She believes He needs no physician to help, no priest to invoke the power of God; rather He himself is divine. He is no mere healer but rather God in the flesh!

Her conviction produces a remarkable boldness. Remember, according to Leviticus 15, anyone who touches this woman or is touched by her will also become unclean as she is. Yet this woman bravely disregards this and makes her way through the crowds to touch Him. She believes that Jesus is greater than any purity law. Instead of her uncleanness being passed to Him, she trusts His righteousness will be passed to her. This woman humbles herself and in faith reaches out to be healed by a man she knows to be God. In response, Jesus delights in the woman's faith. He says to her, *“Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your plague.”* Because of her faith, Christ made her well and redeemed her from her illness and uncleanness.

Now, what of the other approach to Jesus in chapter 5? Jesus came upon the bleeding woman while on His way to heal Jairus' daughter. With sincerity, Jairus recognizes Jesus as a healer who might “lay His hands on” his daughter and heal her. On the way to heal Jairus's daughter, Jesus detours to heal this bleeding woman. Then, in verse 35, Jesus and his traveling party are informed that the girl has died and shouldn't bother coming any more.

Keep in mind that Jairus is one of the rulers of the synagogue. This would suggest that he knew the Scriptures well. A man of his position, in his circumstance would likely recall 2 Samuel 12, which recites King David's response to losing a child. *"While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."* Likewise, Job loses all of his children in Job 1:21 and responds, *"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised."* But isn't it interesting that Jesus' response to Jairus is the same as to the bleeding woman. He meets him with encouragement, saying, *"Do not fear, only believe."* Jesus appeals to him to have faith in Him and His power.

When they arrive at Jairus' house, Jesus tells those who mourn the girl that she is asleep. The fact that they laugh at him (verse 40) tells us two things: 1) The girl is dead; there is no mistake about it. 2) These people did not understand what Jesus meant by "asleep." Jesus is not denying that the girl is dead. He is surely aware of the state of Jairus's daughter. Instead, he is equating death to sleep in order to teach these people about His power over death and the nature of the afterlife (Throughout the New Testament, dead believers are often referred to as being asleep).

Jesus then does something very interesting. He says to the girl, *"Talitha Cumi,"* which means, "little girl, I say to you, arise" in Aramaic. When Mark chose to record Jesus' words in Aramaic, he is calling attention to the fact that she is healed by Jesus' spoken command. Surely, dead people cannot be obedient; they are dead! When Jesus tells the dead girl to get up, she has no power to obey. Yet, we see that the power of her resurrection is in Jesus' words alone. His command goes forth and with it goes the power necessary to carry it out. In addition to the physically dead, God calls the spiritually dead to life. He alone can do so, and He alone gives us the power to be obedient and follow Him. Christ's words that give life to Jairus' daughter are a picture of how His word gives spiritual life to those He calls from spiritual death.

In both of these displays of faith and healing, the afflicted are in apparently hopeless conditions. No physician could help the woman. Death, of which there is no seeming return, had taken Jairus's daughter. Yet in both examples, Christ, in His power, proves Himself to be hope for the hopeless. With faith in Him, there is hope for healing and life regardless of the circumstances.

## **LifeGroup Study Questions**

### **Discussion:**

What is faith? How do we see faith exemplified in these verses?

### **Understanding/Application:**

Are there any areas of your life, where you feel hopeless? If so, what are they?

What do you think it looks like to trust Jesus in these areas?

What does it mean to be spiritually dead? (see Ephesians 2:1-10)

How have you seen Christ' power at work in your life and in the lives of those around you?

Are you more apt to depend on your own power and abilities or on Jesus'? What do you think that reveals about you?

### **Further Scripture:**

Ephesians 2:1-10

2 Corinthians 5:21

2 Corinthians 12:9

Genesis 15:6

Romans 4

# Chapter Six



## Mark 6:1-13

*“A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher”*

– Luke 6:40

Chapter six opens with Jesus’ return to his hometown. Though not his birthplace, Nazareth is called his hometown because it was where His family lived and He was raised. The last time He was home, people tried to throw Him off a cliff (Luke 4:29). Yet in His grace and patience, He returned another time. Jesus doesn’t desire for anyone to die without salvation (2 Peter 3:9, Ezekiel 18:32) but that all might repent and live, even those who sought to kill Him.

In verse 2, we see right away that things in Nazareth are going to be different than elsewhere. Jesus teaches on the Sabbath and in a synagogue. This is important because it reflects the hearts of the Nazareth people. They don’t run to find Him in the desert or meet him in the market place. Instead, they gather in the synagogue on the Sabbath in their typical religious fashion. When He begins teaching, they say to themselves, *“where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands?”*

They acknowledge that Jesus teaches with wisdom even though they knew that He had grown up without a formal education of the Holy Scriptures. They take note of his miracles but question their source. Then in verse 3 something interesting happens. *“Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us? AND THEY TOOK OFFENSE AT HIM”* (emphasis added).

Why would they be offended? First, they note his work *“Is this not the carpenter?”* Woodworking was a laborious job, and those who practiced it were not highly regarded in society. They were blue-collar men, hard working and rough around the edges. The people are offended at Jesus and His teachings because He came from regular origins. He wasn’t high class.

Then the audience points out how they are familiar with His family. They know where He came from. They make no mention of His father, which some believe suggests they believed Jesus was birthed out of wedlock. They mention that His sisters are even with them. They are offended by Jesus’ teaching because He is familiar to them. They know of His family and know He comes from no place more special than they.

They reject Jesus because He doesn’t fit their mold for the Messiah. They reject the idea that the Christ could come from normal means like them. *“And Jesus*

*said to them, 'A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.' And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. And he marveled because of their unbelief."*

This passage is not teaching that God somehow needs our faith to do something supernatural. God is God, and He can do as He pleases regardless of our disposition (Psalm 115:3). Instead, we should ask ourselves why Jesus Christ did miracles at all. When He heals the sick, He teaches that He is *the* healer. When He causes the blind to see and the lame to walk, He fulfills the prophecies regarding the Messiah and He teaches that He is here to fix what is broken and to restore that which has been destroyed. His miracles are metaphors that teach us about His true identity.

So why then, when these people have such little faith, does He not do mighty works? What good would it do Him to give signs that He is who He says He is when their hearts are hardened and bent on disbelief? This is why He marveled because of their unbelief; not because He needed their faith to fuel His power but because a skeptical and unbelieving crowd had no use for the Savior that His mighty works point him out to be.

How does Christ respond to rejection? Does He become discouraged and throw in the towel? Does He mope around the house and complain to His disciples about how hard it is to be shunned by the very people He is trying to help? No! He presses on towards the mission He came to accomplish. He presses on by continuing to preach His message and sending His disciples out for the Kingdom's sake (verse 7).

In a way, His ministry had been preparing for this time when He would send out His followers to teach others as He had taught them. Remember when God told Abraham, "*Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing*" (Genesis 12:1-2). He said that He would bless Abraham so that Abraham would be a blessing. The disciples were not hanging out with Jesus so they would merely witness His miracles and hear His teachings. The goal wasn't for them finish their lives and only be able to say, "Man, we got to see and hear some cool things. Thanks, God!" Rather, they were being taught so that they might teach. They received that they could give. They were not saved for salvation's sake, but rather that as a result, others would be saved also and God's glory would spread. They were saved for God's sake that His restoration of creation would continue

## **Life Group Study Questions**

**Discussion:**

Do you think being a Christian in America is easy or difficult? Why or why not? What are some obstacles you think the Church has to overcome to bring the message of Jesus to our culture?

**Understanding/Application:**

Jesus' own people rejected Him because they felt they were too familiar with Him. Did you grow up in a "Christian home?" Whether you did or didn't, how do you think this affects your relationship with Jesus today?

How do you deal with rejection? Can you persist when things aren't going the way you want them to?

How can you show mercy for those who have done you harm in the past? What does grace for those who oppose you look like in your life?

Throughout your life, what has Jesus taught you and done in your life? How have you used these things to point others towards Him?

**Further Scripture:**

Genesis 12

2 Corinthians 5:20

Revelation 2:1-7

## Mark 6:14-29

*“After me One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals.”*

*– John the Baptist*

These verses about John the Baptist’s death begin with speculations people are making about Jesus’ identity. We see several opinions, *“He is Elijah.” And others said, “He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old.” But when Herod heard of it, he said, “John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.”* Isn’t it interesting that these people, who have refused to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, substitute other miraculous origins of His identity? That is to say, there is a common belief among them that allows for the Elijah’s return (as prophesied by the prophet Isaiah). The idea that He is a prophet of old who has returned from the grave is filled with irony. Jesus tells them that He is the living God, and they say that He is a dead prophet raised to life. Then later His resurrection from death is announced (a concept these people had supposed for him earlier), they say that He either never died, or that the disciples stole his body and hid it. We see, then, that a hard heart that is intent on disbelief will do anything to avoid accepting the Truth.

Herod Antipas was the son of Herod the great. He and his six brothers divided their father’s estate, which was now under Roman control. Therefore, Herod Antipas was tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, an administrator of Rome. Technically, he was not a king even though he thought of himself as such. If it would be too bold for me to tell you that you are Herod Antipas, then I will opt to tell you that he surely represents me. I often think of myself more highly than I ought (you could use the word “king” if you were so inclined). As we work through this story, you might too see we all are indeed Herod Antipases.

John’s rebuke in verse 18 comes from Leviticus 18, a book of Jewish law. This is important because Herod Antipas was not a Jew. To read this in light of the gospel, we conclude that Christ has called everyone to righteousness, both Jews and Gentiles. Herod Antipas had divorced his wife Aretas and married his still living brother’s wife Herodias. John is telling him that although he might think that Herodias will satisfy him, she will not. This is idolatry. Only God can satisfy. John the Baptist asks Herod to accept of God’s mercy and repent of his idol. Jesus, like John here, also calls us to repent from those things that we hopelessly seek fulfillment in and instead turn to Him. Herod’s response to John’s rebuke is a valuable lesson about a potentially detrimental thought process that we can be in danger of as well.

In verse 19 we see that Herod did not listen to John (and keeps Herodias for his wife) but neither does he do the will of Herodias and kill John. It would seem that

Herod thought he could have both. He believed he could keep Herodias (his sin) and yet remain in right standing with John whom *he feared*.

Jesus Christ came to save the world. He calls us to repent of our own personal idols, to repent of our “brother’s wives.” He does this with such great kindness because He knows that He alone can satisfy us. The good news is that through faith in His death and resurrection we are forgiven and redeemed for all of our sinful idolatry and freed to worship God as our source of satisfaction. However, we cannot have them both. When Jesus calls you to faith by repentance from your sin and return to Him, either you will choose your sin or you will choose to love and follow Jesus. Herod, when caught in the decision to break an oath or forsake his illegitimate wife and do what was right, chose his sin. Jesus brings freedom from sin, not freedom to sin. We have to make our choice. We cannot have them both.

### **Life Group Study Questions**

#### **Discussion:**

What can you not live without?

#### **Understanding/Application:**

Where do you tend to search for satisfaction other than Jesus?

How is Jesus better than the answer above?

Is there any sin you are trying to keep living with even though you know Jesus is calling you from it? If so, what?

If repentance is turning from your sin and taking steps towards God, how will this look for the sin you’re dealing with right now?

Can you testify to the satisfaction of Jesus? How?

#### **Further Scripture:**

Romans 6

Galatians 2:20

## Mark 6:30-56

*“Once you become aware that the main business that you are here for is to know God, most of life's problems fall into place of their own accord.”*

*- J. I. Packer*

This section of Mark 6 could be broken into three separate stories: Jesus feeding the five thousand, Jesus walking on water, and Jesus healing the sick in Gennesaret. However, a theme traceable in all three is Jesus' identity: God the Son.

Starting in verse 30, the apostles tell Jesus not only what they taught, but also what they did. For Jesus had taught them to be both hearers and doers of the word (James 1:22). He modeled this for them in His ministry of teaching and performing mighty works that they might do the same in their own ministries in His name. Jesus knows they need rest after their work and says, *“Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.”* Jesus meets their need by leading them to a place of rest with Him. Interestingly, He doesn't call them to some wonderful garden or rejuvenating hot spring but to the desert. In the desert, there is no doubt that Jesus provides their rest (not their surroundings or circumstances). Rest is found in Him alone.

As Jesus leads his disciples into the desert, those who recognize Him for who He is have so much hope in Him that they run on foot to follow Him. To run after the disciples while they are trying to pursue rest was undoubtedly rude. Yet, instead of turning them away, Jesus has compassion on them. Their rudeness is met with generosity and hospitality. Mark says that Jesus sees that they are like sheep without a shepherd. This is an important description for several reasons.

1. A shepherd provides. They follow Him because they need to hear what He has to say so He teaches them his word. When they become physically hungry, He feeds them.
2. Before Jesus performs the miracle of feeding the five thousand, the author of Mark carefully explains that Jesus commanded the people to *sit down in groups on the green grass* (verse 39). By calling the people sheep and noting the color of the grass, we see blatant similarities between this event and Psalm 23, *“The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures.”* This inference points to Christ as God.

In verse 41, Jesus looks to heaven, blesses the small portion of food, and gives it to the people. In Exodus 16, God provides manna for Israel his people who had followed him into the desert. God fed people in the desert with miraculous bread from heaven and now He does so again when Jesus feeds these people in the desert with miraculous bread. In the words of Matthew Henry, a 17<sup>th</sup> century

English theologian, “This miracle was significant, and shows that Christ came into the World to be the great feeder as well as the great healer; not only to restore, but to preserve and nourish spiritual life; and in Him there is enough for all that come to Him, enough to fill the soul, to fill the treasures; none are sent empty away from Christ, but those that come to Him full of themselves.” The parallels in this event are obvious: Christ IS God.

Here, Jesus has a huge crowd gathered to hear Him teach, but He uses His next actions to teach His disciples something important: He turns the crowds away for Him to have time to pray. They are dispersed so that He might have an opportunity to draw close to the Father. Jesus is and was in perfect community with the Father because the triune God is one. If ever anyone existed who wouldn't need time in prayer, it would have been Jesus. But here He is modeling for us an important facet of human existence: we need to spend time in prayer with God. The point of our lives is not the work of ministry. The point is restoration of our relationship with God. Ministry calls others to God that they too may be reconciled *to* Him. But it should never distract us *from* Him. Spending time doing things for God is not enough; knowing Him is the most important thing.

What happens next makes this distinction even clearer. The disciples spent plenty of time with Christ, but because of their hard hearts (verse 52) they missed out on understanding who He actually was. Verse 52 says, “*and they were utterly astounded, (at Jesus' walking on water and calming the wind) for they did not understand about the loaves.*” What did they miss about the loaves that would change their reaction to the winds ceasing to blow when Jesus steps aboard the boat? Remember the question the disciples pose in chapter 4, “*Who then is this, that even the wind and sea obey him?*” If they understood the loaves, they would have understood the answer to this very question. For when Jesus performs the miracle of the loaves, He imitates the miracle of the manna in the desert. Jesus was telling them that He and God were one and the same. Understanding the loaves is to understand that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh!

Christ, however, is patient, and continues to work towards revealing Himself to them as God with us. Notice Jesus' intention to pass by the disciples in verse 48. The word “*parerchomai*” translates “to pass by.” The Greek translation of the Old Testament uses this word in Exodus 33 when God causes His glory to “pass by” Moses that He might be seen for who He is. Jesus' actions again reflect His identity as God.

The final recording in Mark 6 is Jesus' healing in Gennesaret. Despite the disciples' unawareness of who Jesus' was, the people of Gennesaret have no questions. The passage says, “*immediately the people recognized him and ran about the whole region and began to bring the sick people on their beds to*

*wherever they heard he was. And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or countryside, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment.”* To believe that touching His clothes would heal was to believe that the power to heal was within him. Healers did not heal by their own power but by the power of the divine. Ordinary healers called on the external power from the gods. To be healed by touching Jesus recognizes that the power to heal is within Him. These people who meet Him for the first time understand that this man *is* God.

## **Life Group Study Questions**

### **Discussion:**

What are significant characteristics of your closest relationships?

### **Understanding/Application:**

What does your time with Jesus look like? Would you say you spend a lot of time with Him?

What is the danger of spending time working for Him and still not knowing Him?

What do you know about God?

How has He shown you who He is?

Brainstorm some ways you can pursue knowing Christ deeply.

### **Further Scripture:**

Psalm 23

Psalm 29

Psalm 139

Psalm 145

(The Psalms are full of good reflections on God's character)

# Chapter Seven



## **Mark 7:1-23**

*“The message of Christ is not Christianity. The message of Christ is Christ.”*

*-Gary Amirault*

In this passage, Jesus is talking to the Pharisees and Scribes who have been sent from Jerusalem to investigate Him. At this time in history, the Jews followed many laws that were not given to them by God but laws they created. Among those laws was the law of cleansing prior to eating. The Pharisees and Scribes scrutinize Jesus for His lack of washing. However, Jesus retorts with His own rebuke. He quotes Isaiah 29:13 in which God rebukes the leaders of Israel for worshipping the traditions of men rather than the laws of God. Then, in Isaiah 29:14, God states that he will remove wisdom from the wise and discernment from the discerning. Interestingly enough, the Pharisees were viewed as the wise and the Scribes viewed as those who discerned the Scriptures. Jesus has called these men's attention to this passage and told them that the day of this prophecy has come.

Next, Jesus proves to them that their hearts are rebellious towards God and His commandments. He takes a commandment made by men, “Corban,” and he shows how they use it to disregard God's command to honor their parents. Part of keeping God's command to honor parents meant to care for them financially and personally. However, Jewish tradition allowed funds originally dedicated to the care of parents to be declared “Corban” (which means “dedicated to God”). The funds would then be given to the temple instead of being used to care for the parents. Jesus ends up exposing their rebellious hearts by revealing how they would take doing something good like dedicating resources to the temple and use it to be disobedient to God by dishonoring their parents! He uses Isaiah 29:13 to show them that they have used their religion to invent ways to disobey God.

In verse 14, Jesus calls the crowd around Him ending His private rebuke against the Pharisees. He explains to the public that evil comes from within (James 1:14, Romans 7:18). Do not take this section lightly. When Jesus “declared all foods clean,” it was a huge deal. The Jews were a people set apart by God. Since they were set apart, they adhered to certain methods of maintaining their culture. They would only eat certain foods. Jesus saying that they could eat anything they wanted and saying food did not defile them was similar to Him going to a youth group in the south and declaring all music clean. It would have confused a lot of people, and it did. Jesus wants us to understand that we are to obey two laws: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your mind, and with all your soul, and love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37-40). While the

Jewish people were quick to regulate what went into their mouths and what they touched in order to prevent defilement, we should be quick to investigate our own hearts and see what corruption is already there. Jesus' words show that no matter how righteous our outward actions may appear it's our hearts that make us unrighteous. Though the Pharisee's can clean cups, pots, and pitchers, they can do nothing to cure the heart. However, Jesus can and did through His work in the cross and resurrection.

Jesus says we should stop looking at your mouths, hands, and feet, and instead look at our hearts.

### **LifeGroup Study Questions:**

#### **Discussion:**

When people outside the Church think of Christians, do you think they think of people who just perform religious practices, or people who have been freed from religious duty and self-made righteousness? Why?

#### **Understanding/Application:**

Why do you pray, sing at church, and go to church? Why do you try to be a good person or a "good Christian?" What does this passage say about our motivations?

What is your "Corban"? (What do you do that looks "good" in order to not be truly obedient to God?)

If defilement comes from within, in what ways is your heart defiled?

How do you pursue self-righteousness instead of the righteousness found in Christ?

#### **Further Scripture:**

Isaiah 64:6

Mark 10:18

Isaiah 29:13-24

## Mark 7:24-37

*“The Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became Man for no other purpose.”*

*- C. S. Lewis*

Read Isaiah 29:13-24 paying careful attention to verses 17-19. After a short time in Gennesaret (a town on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee), Jesus and His disciples traveled northwest to Tyre on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. Jesus travels from the Jewish people in Gennesaret to the Diaspora (dispersed) Jews in Tyre (a city in Lebanon). For Jesus to travel such a great distance shows His dedication to His sheep. He goes even to foreign lands to bring the Kingdom of God to all of Abraham’s children.

“Immediately a woman...came and fell down at his feet.” Notice this Gentile woman’s response to Jesus’ presence. When she discovered He was nearby, her reaction was quick and decided. Her reaction was humble and confident. She knew He was a Jew and therefore he did not associate with Gentiles like herself; however, this Jew (Jesus) had come to visit Gentile territory. She had hoped that He could help. She knew she did not deserve His help because not only was she a woman (something that was viewed negatively in this culture) but she was also a Gentile or non-Jew who were also called “dogs”. Yet, her posture was at His feet and her words were earnest with hope to heal her daughter.

Remember that “bread” in the Gospels typically refers to Christ. It is Christ, Himself, not His gift or creation. Paul says Jesus came to bring salvation, “first to the Jew then to the Gentile.” In this interaction, Jesus exemplifies the truth Paul would later exclaim. He came to fulfill His covenant to Abraham (Genesis 12:2-3): first to bless Abraham and His line, then through Abraham to bless all the families of the earth. Jesus tests this woman’s faith. What is it that she really wants? In whom does she really believe? She stands firm in her faith, acknowledges Christ as her bread (sustenance), asks for even a crumb of His blessing, and receives it fully and her daughter is healed. (Further reading: See 1 Kings 17:8-24. Note that God provides an unending supply of bread to this woman because of her faith that the Word of God is Truth. Also, remember the parallel between bread and Jesus, the Bread of Life. Finally, note with what difficulty Elijah brings back this boy versus Jesus’ powerful decree, “Talitha cumi” Mark 5:41. This story of Elijah takes place in the same region, and that is one reason why some thought Jesus to be the Elijah returned in Mark 8)

After this episode of Jesus healing the Gentile woman’s daughter, Jesus leaves the region of Tyre and Sidon (Lebanon) and goes to the Decapolis (literally “the

area of the ten cities”). These ten cities were not part of Israel. They were a Gentile area where dispersed Jews lived. The fact that Jesus travels to these regions demonstrates three things: 1.) Jesus is the Shepherd who would leave 99 sheep to pursue the 1 that has gone far off; 2.) Jesus came not only for the Jews but also for the Gentiles; and 3.) A life of following Jesus means to follow Him no matter what, no matter where (Mark 8:34). In Decapolis, a man is brought to Jesus who cannot hear or speak. This man was utterly incapable of perceiving the message of Christ. Yet his friends “interceded” for him (they brought Him to Jesus and begged Jesus for his sake), and Jesus healed him.

By healing the deaf, the mute, and the demonized, Jesus even further establishes His authority as the Messiah. In these events, Mark reveals how Christ’ actions are fulfilling God’s Word in Isaiah 29. Christ extends His redemption to the world, not just the Jews. His Kingdom contains men and women of every nation and ethnicity. His message is still today for all God’s children to come to Him.

### **LifeGroup Study Questions:**

#### **Discussion:**

How does our culture view evangelism?

Have you ever seen a street preacher here in Columbia? How did it make you feel?

#### **Understanding/Application:**

When was the last time you talked to someone about Jesus?

Do you follow Jesus? Or ask Him to follow you?

How should we respond to the knowledge that Christ’ message is for the world?

What do you think it means for Jesus to be our bread? (Read John 6:26-40) How does this affect the way you live and tell others about him?

Do you think our LifeGroup is missional? How are we actively spreading the Gospel to the world around us? In what ways can we improve?

#### **Further Scripture:**

Isaiah 29

1 Kings 17:8-24

Matthew 28:19-20

John 6:26-40

# Chapter Eight



## **Mark 8:1-21**

*“Jesus is God spelling Himself out in language that men can understand.”*

*-S.D. Gordon*

The major themes running throughout Mark 8 are Jesus' identity as the Messiah and mankind's spiritual blindness. We will see these reoccurring in all the events recorded in this section.

First, we see the miracle of the feeding of the 4,000. Many skeptics think that this is just the same event from Mark 6 but that is unlikely because different details are given. In addition, nobody really makes mistakes about something so incredible like 4,000 people being fed from just a few pieces of bread and fish. Nonetheless, here we see that Jesus comes to the disciples with the situation of the hungry people and tests them. They are confused and don't know what to do. We could be quick to say they are dumb and should know by now that Jesus can feed these people because He just did it a few chapters ago, but the disciples often reflect our own natures. How quickly do we witness God do something amazing only to forget and lack faith later on? Yet, Jesus is patient with them just as He is patient with us.

Jesus' miracles always demonstrate the power of God while revealing something to us about Himself. Jesus' feeding of the 4,000 shows us His deep compassion for people and willingness to meet their needs. Jesus provides abundantly. He is a fountain overflowing.

Do we come to Him with a humble recognition of His power? Just as these people relied on Christ to feed their physical hunger, we also come to Him knowing that He is our only way to be satisfied spiritually. We know that He is quick to completely fill our deepest desires for satisfaction; yet, do we reflect this truth about God to the world around us? Do our communities see a generous, compassionate, and providential God in the way we live our lives?

As in the instance with the 5,000, the miracle of the 4,000 reveals a lot about Christ's identity. Yet the Pharisees came to Jesus challenging Him on this aspect. The Pharisees are asking for Jesus to give them signs from Heaven so they could know He is who He appeared to be. This is arrogant and prideful of the Pharisees. Jesus has recently fed 5,000 people with next to nothing, followed by walking on water, followed by healing a bunch of people, followed by feeding another 4,000 people with scraps. Still, they are saying “Okay, Jesus we see all these small time miracles but show us something big time, something directly from God!” They didn't think the signs Jesus was doing were good enough. The

word “test” that is used to describe the Pharisee’s actions here is the same idea of the devil’s interaction with Jesus in the wilderness earlier. Their demand for a sign excluded the essential demand that Jesus required: a change of heart. The Pharisees wanted Jesus to be the Messiah on their terms; therefore, Jesus doesn’t give them a sign. Their hearts are too hard.

Jesus takes his next opportunity to teach the disciples about the danger found in hearts like the Pharisees’. He tells them to watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod. Yeast will affect a whole lump of dough when even just a small portion is added. We see here that even a little bit of sin will harm our fellowship with God. Jesus is teaching us to watch out for self-centered and self-reliant unbelief.

The disciples are still unable to grasp spiritual truth and think Jesus is talking about the lack of bread they have with them. Jesus responds to them by reminding them of His past faithfulness. Finally, he asks, “Do you still not get it?” After witnessing such an enormous miracle twice, the disciples were supposed to understand by now that the one who was with them was the eternal creator and giver of life. But they missed the mark. We would do well to meditate often on God past faithfulness and examine our hearts for the same unbelief.

### **LifeGroup Study Questions:**

#### **Discussion:**

Do you ever have doubts about God? What are they?

#### **Understanding/Application:**

How do you see Jesus’ identity being revealed in this text?

How does Jesus help put our doubts to rest?

Do we care for others the way Jesus cares for the people in this text? (Note: 30,000 people die of starvation every day, and yet, we are supposed to be Jesus’ hand and feet in the world today.)

How aware are you of your sin? How does it affect your relationship with God?

In what ways are you self-centered and self-reliant when Jesus calls you to trust Him?

How often will you only accept Jesus on your terms rather than on His?

#### **Further Scripture:**

Philippians 2:14-15

John 14:6  
Acts 14:32  
Colossians 1:24  
Ephesians 3:20  
Isaiah 55:1-2

## Mark 8:22-30

*“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”*

*- AW Tozer*

Here we have one of the most interesting miracles found in the Gospels. Some unique questions arise from this miracle. First, why would Mark record this miracle in between the other two events? It doesn't seem to fit. Next, why does the miracle happen in stages? Also, why does Jesus spit on this guy?

To begin, why would this miracle be placed where it is in Scripture? One answer is simply that this miracle happened in this way chronologically speaking. However, this event, although seemingly wedged between a large miracle and Jesus' proclamation of His Messiahship, is actually central to the theme of chapter 8. An unobservant reader might be tempted to mistake Jesus for being barely powerful enough to heal the man. In reality, what happened is the center of what the whole chapter is about: blindness, physically and spiritually.

This realization leads us to the next question. Why does this miracle take place in stages? We certainly know that Jesus is not unable to heal the man instantly. Up to now, Jesus has not only healed many blind people, but he had also raised the dead to life, calmed a storm, and even been able to heal people without being present. Therefore, this text by no means indicates a limit in His power to heal. Then, why would the healing come in stages?

The progression of this miracle has a purpose. As with all miracles, the primary purpose is to reveal Jesus as the Messiah and to give glory to God. But in addition Jesus uses His miracles to teach us eternal truths. Here Jesus uses this man's physical blindness to teach about our own spiritual blindness.

When it comes to spiritual blindness, there are a number of things we need to understand. First, we must all recognize that we have been spiritually blind and are still healing from this now (2 Cor. 4:4, 1 John 2:11). None of us have all the answers nor do any of us completely know the fullness of God. Some are totally blind, while others, by the grace of God, have begun to see a little though not fully yet. We gain a small glimpse of who our Lord is and recognize that there is still more of Him we have yet to behold. If the blind man didn't admit he couldn't fully see, then he would be going around talking to trees and chopping down people. In the same way, if we aren't willing to walk before Christ and confess that He is God and we are not, we will do just as much damage if not more! We won't fully know God until we're willing to admit that we don't perfectly know Him. We must humble ourselves before Him and confess how much greater and

beyond our understanding He is.

Jesus heals this man of his blindness until he can clearly see Christ and those around him. In the same way, Jesus heals us (1 Peter 2:24). Philippians 1:6 tells us that God will complete the work He started in us. Hebrews 12:2 indicates Jesus is the Perfecter of our in-need-of-perfection faith. We are healed from blindness when we let the Lord take us by the hand and show us the way.

Afterwards, Jesus pulls His disciples aside and questions them regarding His identity. He wanted to know who they thought He was. Could they “see”? The good news is God does not intend on leaving us alone in our spiritual ignorance but delights in teaching us the Truth. God wants us to know Him deeply, intimately, and truthfully. This is why He has given us the Bible! This is why He sent His Son Jesus! This is what He was asking of the disciples, and now he asks of us. Who do we say He is?

Spiritual sight is a gift. We are fools to think that we can earn it by our own efforts. Only by God’s grace do we have any knowledge of Him. We should walk humbly in that truth asking the Lord to continually grant us sight of Himself through His Word and the work the Holy Spirit.

### **LifeGroup Study Questions:**

#### **Discussion:**

How are you different today than you were 5, 10, or 15 years ago?

#### **Understanding/Application:**

What have you learned about God that you didn’t know when you first became a Christian?

How has this understanding changed who you are and how you live?

What does a life lived in humility towards God look like?

Are you currently pursuing growing in your relationship with God? If so, how?

What is He showing you?

#### **Further Scripture:**

Romans 14

Jeremiah 29:13-14

John 14:26

1 John 3:2

Hebrews 12:2

Philippians 1:9-11  
Exodus 34:15-21

## Mark 8:31-38

*“Every Christian has his own cross waiting for him, a cross destined and appointed by God. Each must endure his allotted share of suffering and rejection.”*

*– Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

Jesus begins to teach immediately after revealing His identity to the disciples. Like the Pharisees, the disciples did not fully understand what it meant for Jesus to be the Messiah. They expected the Christ would be a great political leader and would overthrow Rome’s rule. However, Jesus is much greater than a worldly ruler. His Kingdom is eternal and the way He establishes it is not through military might. Rather, He established it by laying down His life. In Scripture, Jesus plainly talks about the difference between an earthly and a heavenly kingdom.

Even after Peter correctly answers Jesus’ question concerning His true identity, spiritual blindness appears again. Peter was still blind to the true nature of the Messiah. Peter is disturbed by the idea that the Christ would suffer. He is so upset by Jesus’ teaching that he pulls Jesus aside and rebukes Him (this is the same word used for driving out demons). Peter speaks with the same mind-set as the Pharisees had. He wants Jesus to fit Peter’s desired role for the Messiah, not the role Jesus can to fill. Jesus rebukes Peter saying, “Get behind me, Satan!” Jesus doesn’t think that Peter is in fact Satan but rather that he (Peter) has his mind set on worldly things rather than eternal things. Peter understands that if what Jesus is saying is true, then it will affect him too and not in the way he was expecting. During this time, every Jew wanted and expected the Messiah to overthrow the current rulers and establish a physical Kingdom. Then, Jesus comes and talks about Himself as a completely different type of Messiah. Jesus’ strength comes from making Himself weak. Instead of a throne, He goes to a cross. The crucified Christ *is* the conquering Christ.

When Jesus calls His disciples to pick up their crosses and follow him, he meant for them to understand that they must die to themselves. A call to follow Jesus is a call to suffer for the sake of the Gospel. There would be no misunderstanding Jesus’ language here. In that day, everyone knew what a cross was and what it was intended to do. It was an instrument for execution, and Jesus calls us to take that on ourselves.

But how does that look? It looks differently for different people. Jesus calls some of us to literally die for the cause of the Gospel, but not everybody. [Would you be willing to die for the message of Christ to go out? Romans 9:3] Jesus further explains what He means by challenging our view of the world in the rest of the chapter. He questions what we have to gain from the world if we don’t know Jesus (Matthew 7:21-23). The more we cling to this world and the things in it,

which are all fading away, the less we will have in the end. Jesus calls us to die to ourselves. That requires us to be selfless. Instead of being self-focused, we are to remain focused on the Gospel and eternity.

**LifeGroup Study Questions:**

**Discussion:**

What does suffering for the Gospel look like for Christians in Columbia? What about the rest of the US? The world?

**Understanding/Application:**

Jesus tells us that He must suffer. Why?

Jesus tells us that WE will suffer. Why?

In what ways do you need to die to yourself now?

Are you eternally minded or thinking always about the temporal?

How can you learn to care more about others and the Gospel than yourself?

**Further Scripture:**

Colossians 3:1-4

Isaiah 53

Galatians 2:20

Luke 6:31

Mark 10:45

John 12:25

Philippians 2:1-10

1 Corinthians 10:24

Romans 8:17