

**On the move
with Jesus
in
MARK
(chapters 5-8)**

**A unique, verse-by-verse,
life-application commentary
by Terran Williams**

You may own a Bible, but does your Bible own you?

- It's not enough to own a Bible. Our Bible should own us. After all, it is the main way God speaks to us.
- Did you know that God put every verse in the Bible so that our minds could be totally renewed, so that our lives could be deeply changed, and so that our calling could be fulfilled? (See 2 Timothy 3:16-17 if you're not persuaded.) That's why reading the whole Bible again and again is one of the most important things we can do.
- Sometimes, however, the Bible is hard to understand. That's why commentaries are so useful. Most commentaries help you understand the *technical* meaning of each verse. These commentaries do a little of that too, but more than that, they focus on the meaning of each verse *for our lives now*.

What's unique about this commentary?

- Most importantly, it helps you to find *the meaning for your life now* in every single verse of the Gospel of Mark.
- It is written with 21st century everyday people in mind.
- It builds on the scholarship of brilliant theologians and commentaries, but doesn't focus on the exhausting technicalities that fill most commentaries.
- It comes with a Group Guide so that you can explore Mark along with others.

A suggested approach to going through Mark

- Make time every day. Allocate as much time as you need to really hear from God for your life. Read until you're full – don't just *snack* on the Bible, rather enjoy a *solid meal*.
- Take your time as you go through Mark, starting at chapter one. It doesn't matter if it takes you an entire year – or five – to get through the whole Bible, just as long as you're *steadily* moving through it.
- Trust God to speak to you every time you read the Bible. Expect to receive just what you need for each day. Invite the Holy Spirit to be your primary teacher as you read.
- Keep two questions in your mind as you read: 1) What do these verses mean? 2) What do they mean for my life now? ***If you can't find solid answers to either of these two important questions then refer to this commentary.***
- Carry into your day what you sense God saying to you. Perhaps write down the main things you sense God telling you each day. Pray to God about what he has just said to you. Make any needed adjustments in your heart and life as God reveals more and more of his Word, will and ways to you.

Main sources used

Special thanks to (and warm commendations of) ...

- *The Today's New International Version Bible (the updated version of the NIV)*
- Michael Eaton's *Preaching through the Bible: Mark*
- Tom Wright's *Mark for Everyone*
- Donald Guthrie's *New Bible Commentary: Third Edition*
- David Guzik's online commentary (www.enduringword.com)
- John Stott's *The Incomparable Christ*

About the Gospel of Mark

God has given us four windows into the earthly life of Jesus. They are the Gospels. Each author captures a different aspect of Jesus. Mark's Gospel is the shortest, and was also written first. It appears that the Gospels of Luke and Matthew used Mark as a major source in the writing of their own Gospels.

“Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). That means that though Mark describes the life of Jesus 2000 years ago, his character and wisdom and power are still available to us. His earthly disciples knew him physically, but we get to know Jesus with the help of the Spirit. Though we don't know everything we'd like to know about Jesus' life on earth, God made sure that we'd have enough information about him so that, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we too can say that we “know” Jesus.

The Gospel is written by Mark. Mark was the son of a widow named Mary whose home was used by the earliest Christians (see Acts 12:12). Mark was friends with the apostle Peter, from whom he no doubt drew most of his information. He wrote it fairly soon after the events described, probably in the AD50s.

One thing that sticks out in the Gospel of Mark is its pace. Again and again, the word “immediately” is used (40 times in fact!). We see Jesus packing a whole bunch of travel, ministry and teaching into short periods of time. Jesus is a man on the move. That's why this commentary is titled *On the move with Jesus in Mark*.

Outline of the Gospel of Mark

1:1-20 - The beginning of Jesus' ministry

1:21-3:6 - Jesus' authority begins to arouse opposition

3:7-6:13 - Jesus withdraws to teach his disciples

6:14-8:26 - A further outreach with even greater rejection

8:27-10:52 - Jesus teaches his disciples while travelling to Jerusalem

11:1-15:47 - Entry into Jerusalem and the events that lead to his death

16:1-8 - Jesus rises from the dead

16:9-20 - A later addition to the Gospel

Experiencing Jesus in blue, green, red and orange

There are four main ways that God seems to speak to us through the Gospels.

1) In some parts of Mark, God highlights to us the wonderful and awesome uniqueness of Christ as Lord and Saviour. When we read these sections, we realize that we certainly can't imitate him in these regards. All we can do is bow down in humility, trust and surrender. Insights based on these parts are colour-coded blue.

2) In other parts of this Gospel, God reveals aspects of Jesus' character and ministry that we can imitate. We can literally be inspired to follow his example. And amazingly, we have the Spirit of Christ in us making it possible to actually do just that. Insights based on these parts are colour-coded green.

3) In yet other parts of this book, God reveals to us pure wisdom through the recorded teachings of Jesus to his disciples, and to the crowds, and to us. Insights based on these parts are colour-coded red.

4) Lastly, the Gospels at times allow us to see Christ through the eyes of people, whether friends or foes. By looking at how these people responded to Christ, we can learn both how and how not to respond to Jesus ourselves. Insights based on these parts are colour-coded orange.

Colour-code summary: the four main ways God speaks to us through the Gospels...

Blue = something about Jesus' uniqueness and Lordship that shows he is worthy of our devotion, trust and surrender

Green = something about Jesus' character or ministry that we can imitate

Red = something Jesus taught that we can understand or apply to our lives

Orange = insights we can apply based on the way various people responded to him

Mark Chapter Five

Colour-code summary: the four main ways God speaks to us through the Gospels...

Blue = something about Jesus' uniqueness and Lordship that shows he is worthy of our devotion, trust and surrender

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Red = something Jesus taught that we can understand or apply to our lives

Orange = insights we can apply based on the way various people responded to him

JESUS SETS A MAN FREE (5:1-20)

Jesus Restores a Demon-Possessed Man

1 They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. [a] 2 When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him. 3 This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. 4 For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. 5 Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

6 When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. 7 He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God's name don't torture me!" 8 For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you evil spirit!"

○ **Satan seeks to wreck lives.**

- This man is an extreme case of demon-possession. He is caught up with the theme of death (as seen in his choice of living in tombs (v2)). He isolates himself and has superhuman strength (v3,4). He is tormented and self-destructive (v5).
- Demon-possession is still a reality today. However, we must avoid assuming that anyone marked by some of the traits listed above is possessed. There are often psychological reasons that explain these things too.
- Although not many people today are demon-possessed (where evil spirits live within a person), certainly many more people are demon-oppressed (where evil spirits persistently afflict a person).
- We aren't told what he did to be inhabited by demons, but we can speculate that he must have invited them in either knowingly or unknowingly. One way to open our lives to demons is involvement in the occult (which is attempting to attain supernatural power or knowledge through any means other than Christ).
- Why does the demon shout out the name of Jesus (v7)? One theologian explains: "The full address is not a confession of Jesus' dignity but a desperate attempt to gain control over him or to render him harmless, in accordance with the common assumption

of the period that the use of the precise name of an adversary gave one mastery over him.”

- Jesus said that Satan seeks to lie, kill and destroy. This man is an extreme example of the devastation Satan can bring to a person, but he has far more subtle ways of destroying us: deception, intimidation, condemnation and temptation. Satan moved this man toward death (by the tombs). Today, he still seeks to move people toward death. 1 John 5:19 speaks of Satan holding onto people, keeping them from the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

9 Then Jesus asked him, “What is your name?”

“My name is Legion,” he replied, “for we are many.” 10 And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.

11 A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. 12 The demons begged Jesus, “Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them.” 13 He gave them permission, and the evil spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

14 Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. 15 When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid.

- **Jesus has authority to set people free.**
 - The events of this story are amazing. A legion of demons. A drowning herd of pigs. A curious crowd. A man set free.
 - Surely the emphasis of this story is that the man “who had been possessed” is now sitting there “in his right mind”. He had previously been running and falling in a frenzy of craziness, now he is “sitting there”. He had been naked, but now he is dressed.
 - The crowd, who knew all about this man no doubt (see verses 3,4) are shocked to the core that Jesus has set him free. People had tried to chain him. But Jesus set him free.
 - If Jesus can set someone like this free, then there is no one on this earth beyond hope, beyond his reach, beyond his power to liberate.

16 Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man—and told about the pigs as well. 17 Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.

- **Never reject the light.**
 - These people should have been so awed by the compassion and power of Christ to set this man free, but instead they were

irritated by the way he had come and changed things. They clearly didn't care much for the man; all they cared for was the loss of their animals.

- Why did Jesus allow the pigs to die? We must remember that Jesus was a Jewish man, and that many of these people were Jewish too. Pigs were forbidden animals for Jews to herd. And that's probably why Jesus in this situation allowed them to die in the place of the man (v13).
- We must all choose: do we want our pigs (ie those aspects of our lifestyle that are forbidden by Christ) or do we want Christ? We cannot have both. Sadly, many reject the light of Christ and embrace darkness instead. Jesus speaks of this in John 3:19,20 when he says, "Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds are evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed."

18 As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. 19 Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." 20 So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.

- **Tell people what Jesus has done for you.**
 - The Decapolis is the name for the 10 towns east of the Jordan that were mainly non-Jewish (Gentile) cities. Jesus restricted his own earthly ministry to the nation of Israel, but eventually he would launch an international mission too (see Matthew 28:18-20). But here already, he sends out a missionary to an area of the world outside of Israel.
 - The apostle Paul is often called "the apostle to the Gentiles" but perhaps the first person who actually deserved this title was this very man. He was the first missionary to the Gentiles.
 - Jesus instructs him very simply: "Go home (ie to your home region) and tell people how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you (v19)." The man does just that and all the people he tells are amazed (v20). It seems this man started off telling first his family and friends in my home town, but then thought to himself, "Let me tell some of the people I know in surrounding towns."
 - Today, we are given the same instruction: tell people what Jesus has mercifully done for you. This is sometimes called our "testimony". Essentially it is the story (or stories) of all the ways that Jesus has positively impacted our lives, despite the fact that we never deserved it.

EXPERIENCING JESUS' RESCUING POWER (5:21-43)

Jesus raises a dead girl and heals a sick woman

21 When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. 22 Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. 23 He pleaded earnestly with him, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live." 24 So Jesus went with him.

A large crowd followed and pressed around him. 25 And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. 26 She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. 27 When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak ...

- **The best thing to do when in distress is go to Jesus.**
 - Imagine being a father of a 12-year-old girl whose life is slipping away like sand through a sieve. And there's nothing you can do about it.
 - Imagine being a woman who has had severe vaginal bleeding for 12 years, and despite all the doctors you've visited and all the money you've spent (every last cent!) nothing has helped. To make it worse, under Jewish law, a woman with blood discharge was unclean and not allowed to touch anyone, not even her own husband (she would have been forced to divorce him and leave home) and certainly not a religious leader of any kind.
 - Jesus encountered two such people. The reason he encountered them is not that he went looking for them, but because they came looking for him.
 - Distress today is just as real. We face all kinds of problems: financial, relational, circumstantial, physical, emotional. And to this day, despite all our medical and self-help breakthroughs, much of our stress and problems are simply unsolvable. Diseases remain incurable. Divorce still happens. Emotional breakdowns happen. Life is hard still.
 - Instead of allowing their pain to drive them away from Jesus (which so often happens) they let their pain drive them towards Jesus. Jairus falls at his feet. And the woman, who is too afraid to go public with what's wrong with her, secretly touches him. Let us follow their example in our pain. Let us run to Jesus. Let us throw ourselves at his feet. Let us reach out and touch him.

27 When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, 28 because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." 29 Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.

30 At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, “Who touched my clothes?”

31 “You see the people crowding against you,” his disciples answered, “and yet you can ask, ‘Who touched me?’”

32 But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. 33 Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. 34 He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.”

- Invite Jesus’ rescuing power into you life and situation through faith.
 - This is a most amazing story. People are thronging around Jesus touching him. But suddenly he feels “power go out from him”. He immediately discerns that someone has been healed. And he wants to know who.
 - This reminds us of Luke 5:17 which says that “the power of the Lord was present for Jesus to heal”. That verse and this one (v30) together suggest that a current of spiritual power flowed from Jesus when he healed people. Profound.
 - Why did Jesus want to know who touched him? There are many reasons? Perhaps, knowing that a miracle had just happened, he wanted to boost Jairus’ faith (as they headed toward his dying daughter). Another reason is that he wanted to take the opportunity to meet the person he had just healed (because it was not just power but also love that flowed from him). Certainly, he spoke to her with tenderness and affirmation, even calling her “daughter”. Can you imagine how affirmed she was by his words? Instead of rebuking her for touching him (and she was trembling with fear that this would happen (v33)) he affirmed her.
 - The main reason that Jesus wanted to know who touched him, however, is that he wanted to use it as an object lesson: *it is faith that conducts the rescuing power of Christ.*
 - This is true not only of healing or receiving help from Christ, but also of salvation. In the words of Spurgeon, “It’s not every contact with Christ that saves men; it is the arousing of yourself to come near to him, the determinate, the personal, resolute, believing touch of Jesus Christ which saves.”
 - From the examples of Jairus and this woman we see that faith expresses itself through our:
 - *Coming to Christ in prayer* (the man came to Jesus (v22) as did the woman (v27)).
 - *Desperation and humility* (Jairus “fell at his feet” (v22) and the woman thought to herself “if I just touch his clothes ...” (v28)).
 - *A bold request* (Jairus “pleaded earnestly” with Jesus (v23)).
 - *A bold action* (the woman touched him (v29)).

35 While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. “Your daughter is dead,” they said. “Why bother the teacher anymore?”

36 Overhearing [*could possibly also be translated, ‘ignoring’*] what they said, Jesus told him, “Don’t be afraid; just believe.”

37 He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. 38 When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. 39 He went in and said to them, “Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.” 40 But they laughed at him.

- **If you face a setback, don’t step back – God’s planning your come back.**
 - Jairus was trusting Jesus to heal his daughter but faced several setbacks. For one, the healing incident of the bleeding woman really slowed Jesus down. You can imagine Jairus getting frustrated as he waited while this was happening. Another setback is that he heard a report that his daughter was dead (v25). Can you imagine the terrible gloom that would have come over him at that moment? Another setback was the overwhelmingly loud sound of people crying because the girl had already died. Yet another setback is that the people laughed in ridicule at his attempts to get Jesus to heal her.
 - Still today, we may be on a path of trusting Christ in some way. We may have experienced Jesus’ assurances in a certain area of our lives. But then we face setbacks such as a delay, bad news or the negative emotions and faithlessness of people around us. Setbacks are real, and can be expected.
 - But notice that Jesus gives Jairus two strong encouragements: “Don’t be afraid; just believe” (v36) and “This child is not dead but asleep.” Still today, when Jesus has genuinely promised us something, we can expect his encouragements when we face setbacks. It’s as though he’s saying to us, “In this setback, don’t step back – I’m planning your come back.”

After he put them all out, he took the child’s father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. 41 He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha koum!” (which means “Little girl, I say to you, get up!”). 42 Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. 43 He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.

- Jesus has power and authority over dangers, demons, disease and death.
 - We must remember that the events recorded in chapter 4 up until 5:43 took place over a period of about two days.
 - In 4:1-34 Jesus teaches by the eastern side of the lake from a boat just offshore. He teaches on the theme of the kingdom of God and how, through our openness to Jesus, it advances in our lives and in our world. *We see that Jesus' authority and power can be experienced if we open ourselves to his grace and authority.*
 - Then 4:35-41 describes how *the evening of that same day* they were caught in the storm. *We see that Jesus has authority and power over dangers.*
 - Then 5:1-20 describes how the next morning on the western side of the lake he sets free the demonized man. *We see that Jesus has authority and power over demons.*
 - Then 5:21-34 speaks of how, on his return to the western side of the lake, he heals the bleeding woman. *We see that Jesus has authority and power over disease.*
 - Then 5:35-43 shows how, immediately afterwards, he raises the little girl from the dead with that command, "Talitha koum". Everyone is rightly astonished (v42). *We see that Jesus has authority and power over death.*
 - What is the learning? We are invited to experience Christ's life-changing power. It is real. If we have any doubt that Jesus' kingdom power is available to us, just ponder these four back-to-back events in which Jesus reveals that he has power and authority over dangers, demons, disease and death. Let us worship him. Let us trust him. Let us yield our lives to him entirely.

Mark Chapter Six

Colour-code summary: the four main ways God speaks to us through the Gospels...

Blue = something about Jesus' uniqueness and Lordship that shows he is worthy of our devotion, trust and surrender

Green = something about Jesus' character or ministry that we can imitate

Red = something Jesus taught that we can understand or apply to our lives

Orange = insights we can apply based on the way various people responded to him

BEWARE OF UNBELIEF (6:1-6a)

A prophet without honour

1 Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples.
2 When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed.

“Where did this man get these things?” they asked. “What’s this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing?”

- **Beware of unbelief especially when considering who Jesus is.**
 - Although he had grown up in Nazareth, we’re told that when he begun his public ministry he had moved to nearby Capernaum (see 2:1), possibly staying in Simon Peter’s house (see 1:29) or maybe renting his own. Now some time later, he returns to his hometown of Nazareth, along with his disciples.
 - He begins to teach in the synagogue – and they are amazed by his apparently newfound wisdom. And they probably have heard of the miracles he has done in nearby Capernaum and by the lake of Galilee. And what’s more, he left as a single man but has come back as a rabbi with his own disciples.
 - Although verse 2 says that they were amazed, we will soon find out it is the amazement of unbelief (see verse 6). This is so tragic since his God-given power and authority is so obvious.
 - There is a difference between doubt and unbelief. Doubt is the *struggle* to believe. Unbelief is the *refusal* to believe. What we have here is unbelief. Despite all the evidence, they refuse to believe. God is merciful to those who doubt (see Jude 23), but he doesn’t deal kindly with our unbelief.

3 Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?”

- Jesus understands the strains of family life and work life.
 - In his first 30 years, Jesus must have given himself to prayer, the study of the Scriptures, and to involvement in the synagogue. But he certainly did far more than that.
 - For starters, he was a hard-working man. We're told that Jesus had been a carpenter. But the word can also be translated "construction worker". It is wonderful to think that of all the professions God could have chosen for Jesus to have when he came to this earth, he chose that of a carpenter, someone who builds and restores things. When he stopped his work as a carpenter, and started his public ministry, he stayed in the building and restoring business, only this time it was people's lives, not blocks of wood or rock that he worked on.
 - And he was also a family man. Presumably his father, Joseph, had died many years before, and presumably he had financially supported his family until the youngest children were able to support themselves and Mary. Notice that, despite a common teaching of parts of the worldwide church, Mary did have other children after Jesus came. She didn't remain a virgin. Notice also that Jesus grew up in a household of at least eight people once his father had died. He lived with his mother, his four brothers and at least two sisters.
 - Hebrews 4:15 highlights that as we approach Jesus we must remember that he deeply empathizes with the weaknesses, challenges and temptations of everyday life, because he lived the full human life.
 - Most of our difficulties in life happen in the area of our relationships, especially with family members, and in the area of our work life with all its challenges. Jesus understands. Feel confident in asking him for grace and mercy to cope and even thrive in these areas of life (see Hebrews 4:16).

- Christ is able to reach our family members who are far from him.
 - Jesus' own family did not believe that he was anything more than an ordinary man. Probably, they struggled to believe that he really was a rabbi, and they refused to believe he was the Messiah launching the kingdom of God on earth (see 3:21,31,32).
 - But amazingly we know that eventually his mother would become a leader in his movement, and James would lead the church of Jerusalem and would write the letter of James, and Judas would even write the letter of Jude. At some point after his resurrection they would eventually believe. We don't know what happened with the others.
 - Be encouraged: you may have friends and family that seem so far from Christ. Keep on praying. Don't give up hope. Christ can reach them yet.

And they took offence at him. 4 Jesus said to them, “Only in their own towns, among their relatives and in their own homes are prophets without honour.”

- **Beware of the unbelief that so easily grows in the seedbed of familiarity.**
 - Despite the amazing wisdom and power of Jesus – and their first response was amazement (v2) – they now take offence at him.
 - In verse 3, we see them taking offence by the way they call him “carpenter” (in other words suggesting that he wasn’t a real rabbi) and “Mary’s son” (they’re rubbing in his face the fact that he grew up without a father).
 - But why did they take offence at him? Why did they refuse to believe? It was because of familiarity. Faith and revelation comes to those who are humble and teachable. But, sadly, familiarity, the feeling that we’ve already figured this all out, goes hand in hand with pride and a refusal to be taught. And faith and revelation don’t come to us when we’re proud and unteachable.
 - Be very careful of the pride and arrogance that result from assuming you’ve already figured everything out. Beware of becoming an expert in anything, because our very sense of being an expert can blind us to anything new.

5 He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. 6 He was amazed at their lack of faith.

- **Beware of unbelief because it hinders the coming of the kingdom in our lives and situations.**
 - Time and again Jesus emphasised that faith is the best way to experience the power of the kingdom in our lives and situations (see 2:5, 4:40, 5:34, 5:36 for example). It’s not that he needed faith to perform miracles (after all, he healed many people when there was no sign of faith (see 3:5 for example). It’s that he usually chose to work miracles when there was faith.
 - Our refusal to believe can massively hinder the coming of the kingdom in our lives. For example, think about the way miracles are happening so numerous in the name of Jesus in those parts of the world which are ready to believe (in Africa, rural China and South America), whereas they aren’t happening as much where people, through intellectual pride and the rejection of a supernatural realm, refuse to believe (in Europe, America and Australia).
 - In Luke 7:9 we’re told that Jesus was amazed by the faith of a non-Jewish man. But here we’re told that he was amazed by the lack of faith (or more accurately, the refusal to believe) of Jewish people. Interestingly, both faith and unbelief amaze Jesus. He is moved positively by our faith, and negatively by our lack of it.

SENT OUT BY CHRIST (6:6b-13)

Jesus sends out the Twelve

Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village. 7 Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits.

- **Opposition to God's work is an ideal opportunity to expand God's work.**
 - As we read the gospel of Mark we notice a pattern. God's work through John the baptizer was met with radical opposition, and at this point Jesus launched his ministry (1:14). Death threats on Christ's life caused him to appoint the Twelve (see the connection between 3:6,7 and 13). Now rejection in his home town causes him to move on and send out the Twelve (v6,7). In the book of Acts we see that the church continued this same pattern (see Acts 8:1 and 4 for example).
 - This is true today: the much-feared opposition to God's work through our lives and churches may mark an opportunity for a new wave of God's work through us. Let us not be discouraged. The setback may just be God's call to step up our ministry impact.

- **Christ calls you closer to himself before he sends you out.**
 - The theme of being "sent" is a major one in the gospel of Mark so far. We see God sending John the baptizer (1:2). We see the Spirit sending Jesus (1:12). And then we see Jesus, on two occasions, promising to send the disciples out (1:17 and 3:14). Now he actually sends them out.
 - Today, to be a Christian is to be a "sent one". The Greek word for send is "apostolos" from where we get the words, apostle and apostolic. The Latin translation is "mission" from where we get the words mission, missional and missionary. Every Christian needs to see themselves as sent out by Christ – not necessarily to another land, but into the context in which we find ourselves.
 - But notice that before Jesus sends his disciples out he always calls them to himself first (1:17, 3:14 and 6:7). This says something. It tells us that intimate relationship with Christ precedes being sent out. It says that mission flows out of worship. Today, the closer we draw to Christ, the more power and authority and conviction we will have as "sent ones".

- **Christ calls you to team together with other disciples.**
 - Jesus sends them out in pairs. Even he never ventured out on a solitary mission (he always had his disciples with him). So when he sends people out he does not send them out alone. They are to minister in team with others. This teaming together will provide the encouragement, protection, companionship and support they so desperately need on the mission.

- Today, we must learn how to build friendship with and partner with other disciples on a similar mission to ours. The mission is simply too important to embark on in isolation.

8 These were his instructions: “Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. 9 Wear sandals but not an extra shirt. 10 Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town.

- **Before embarking on a mission trip, give both practical and spiritual thought to how you will survive.**
 - Why would Jesus tell them to take nothing with them, and to rely on local hospitality? (However, he did instruct them to take a staff and sandals, both vital for the amount of travel they would be doing.) There are several reasons it seems:
 - He wanted them to learn how to be dependent on God to provide for them. If they didn’t know how to trust God themselves for their everyday needs, then how could they so confidently instruct others to trust in God?
 - The reason he told them not to take a bag is probably because he didn’t want people to associate them with the travelling philosophers and religious leaders who would carry along with them a “begging bag”. Although they needed help Jesus never instructed them to beg or even ask for financial help.
 - He wanted to give Israel, the people of God, an opportunity to provide for the disciples.
 - The mission was very urgent and brief so little was needed.
 - When we go on mission trips, do these instructions still apply?
 - We must remember that Israel, despite their hardened hearts, were still God’s people. These men were not involved in ministry to totally unsympathetic pagan people but to God’s people. That’s why, when the apostles, decades later, would go on mission trips to totally pagan lands they would provide for themselves (see 3 John 7 for example). The principle today is therefore this: when ministering to a church, the receiving church should provide financial support, but when involved in pioneer evangelism, the sending church provides support.
 - The other insight is that we need far less “stuff” than we imagine we do, to succeed on a mission trip. This is just the counsel needed today in a culture of great dependence of stuff to survive.
 - In these three verses, Jesus was instructing them, and those of us who get to go on mission trips, to give both practical and spiritual thought to how we will survive.

11 And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them.”

- You *are* responsible for communicating God’s message to people, but you *aren’t* responsible for how they respond to that message.
 - Jesus anticipated that the disciples wouldn’t have a favourable response to their message in every town. He told them to shake the dust off their feet when they left. Why? Firstly, because it was a warning of the judgment that the town was still under, because they had failed to listen to the gracious message of the disciples. It was as if they were saying to the town, “We came into this town to call you to God’s grace. But you have rejected it, and therefore remain under his judgment.” Secondly, it would help the disciples not to carry the responsibility for how people responded to their message. It was their responsibility to communicate the message as persuasively as possible, but then it was the people’s responsibility to respond to it. Shaking the dust off their feet would help them to move on without beating up on themselves for the apparent failure.

12 They went out and preached that people should repent. 13 They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

- Announce and demonstrate the new thing God is doing in the world through Jesus.
 - What was their message? We’re told here that they preached that “people should repent”. Luke 10:9 gives us more detail: they were to announce that “The kingdom of God is at hand.” In other words, they repeated Jesus’ main message (1:15): “The time has come. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the good news.” Said in other words their message was, “God is doing something new! Don’t miss out! Prepare yourself – change your way of thinking and your approach to life!” It would be a year or two before the new thing God was doing would make more sense (once Jesus was crucified, resurrected and exalted), but for now they were to get ready for it.
 - But Jesus didn’t just instruct them to announce the new thing God was doing. He also instructed them to demonstrate its presence through casting out evil and healing the sick.
 - Today, the instruction stands: we as Christ’s disciples must announce the new and urgent thing God is doing in the world through Jesus, and call people to get in on it, and also demonstrate just how real God’s involvement is through demonstrations of power. And he promises to give us the power and authority we need to do just that.

- **Healthcare and Gospel proclamation can go hand in hand.**
 - The point I make here is clearly not what Mark had in mind when he wrote this gospel, but I include it as an encouragement for the millions of Christian healthcare workers in the world.
 - One of the amazing things that God seems to have done in the recent history of the church is to send out Christian medical workers all over the world who combine healthcare and the preaching of the Gospel. This is not an entirely new thing though. We see this in the way that the disciples anointed people with oil. The oil represented the power of God, but it also represented medicine. (Galen, the ancient great Greek doctor, said, “Oil is the best of all instruments for healing diseased bodies.”) Therefore, in a not-so-literal sense, the Gospel-proclaiming messengers were also healthcare workers. Be encouraged if that’s your call.

REPENT OR ELSE ... (6:14-29)

John the baptizer beheaded

14 King Herod heard about this, for Jesus’ name had become well known. Some were saying, “John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.”

15 Others said, “He is Elijah.”

And still others claimed, “He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago.”

16 But when Herod heard this, he said, “John, whom I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!”

- **There are so many opinions about who Jesus really was and is, but so many of them are plain wrong.**
 - People were trying to figure out who Jesus was. Some believed that he was John the baptizer resurrected from the dead. Others believed that he was the return of Elijah (because of the promise of Malachi 4:5). Some believed that he was a prophet.
 - In the midst of all these claims, Herod evaluated the evidence and came to a conclusion about Jesus that was totally wrong – he believed that Jesus was the resurrection of John. This was because his perspective was influenced by his own experiences (he was riddled with guilt for murdering John).
 - Still today, there are multiple theories and opinions about who and what Jesus was, and is. And each person needs to make a decision about the truth. But they also need to be humble enough to admit that our so-called conviction about Jesus was or could be wrong, as Herod was. And we can be wrong about Jesus because we’re influenced by a whole bunch of possibly negative experiences instead of honest objective rationality, again as Herod was.

- If you don't repent of your sin you may be given more chances to repent, but eventually it will be too late.
 - The events of verses 17-29 happened before the event recorded in verses 14-16. In verses 17-29 we see that Herod has already radically hardened his heart to God's message and God's messengers. You would think that God wouldn't give him another chance, but God is merciful once again. He allows the message that God is graciously and powerfully doing something new in the world through Jesus to reach the ears of Herod. All Herod has to do is humbly repent and believe this message, and send for Jesus (and he has the power to do that). But instead he hardens his heart even to this message. He doesn't send for Jesus at all. It seems like this was his last chance. We're told that later Herod would encounter Jesus, but then it was too late: Jesus wouldn't let any more of God's word be spoken to Herod. And Herod would reject Jesus entirely (see Luke 23:7-12).
 - God's mercy is surprisingly enduring. But it has a limit. If we harden our hearts repeatedly to the message God is speaking to us eventually he will stop speaking to us entirely.

17 For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, whom he had married. 18 For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." 19 So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, 20 because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him.

- If you don't repent of your sin it will progressively harden your heart.
 - Herod Antipas (one of the sons of Herod the Great spoken of in Matthew 2:1-20) ruled over Galilee and was at work in the development of the temple.
 - He had committed a great sin. He had murdered his wife (the princess of a great king to the East) and had stolen Herodias from Philip, her former husband and his very own brother!
 - John courageously confronted Herod regarding this evil, calling him to repent. But instead of repenting, Herod arrested John.
 - But still it seemed that John kept on preaching to Herod. William Lane, a theologian, speaks of Herod's growing hardness of heart like this: "More weak than cruel, Herod listened to John with an undeniable fascination. John's word left him perplexed, and in anguish. Yet he found a strange pleasure in the authoritative preaching of this holy man, whose stringent life gave added power to his probing word. Too weak to follow John's counsel, he nevertheless had to listen but refused to do anything about it."

- Herod felt guilty but refused to acknowledge his guilt. He seems to have protected John the baptizer from his wife (who wanted him dead) as a way of making him feel better about himself.
- We must repent of sin rather than refuse to repent. The longer we refuse, the harder our heart becomes.

21 Finally the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. 22 When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests.

The king said to the girl, "Ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you." 23 And he promised her with an oath, "Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom."

24 She went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?"

"The head of John the Baptist," she answered.

25 At once the girl hurried in to the king with the request: "I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter."

26 The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. 27 So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, 28 and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother. 29 On hearing of this, John's disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

- **If you don't repent of your sin, that sin will lead to more and more sin.**
 - Herodias and Herod had sinned. They had been challenged to repent. But they refused. As a result they became increasingly entangled in their own sin. Here we see how it leads to the murder of an innocent prophet. But there were so many different kinds of sin in their lives simply because they would not repent. There was the nursing of a grudge and deep murderous hatred (v19). There was one person manipulating another (Herodias tricked Herod into murdering John). There was the fear of what people would think (v26). There was the corrupting of an innocent third party, Herodias' daughter who was complicit in the execution of John.
 - The longer it takes for us to repent of a sin, the greater the web of that sin grows in our lives. Unrepented-of sin begets more and more sin.
 - Other than God's judgment of the couple, history tells us that they did reap the consequences of their sin eventually. The devastated father of Herod's late wife, who he killed, was a king who defeated Herod in battle. Ten years after the murder of John, Herod and Herodias were banished to the Roman province of Gaul where they committed suicide. The lesson is clear: if we don't repent of our sin it leads to death.

THE FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND (6:30-44)

Jesus feeds the five thousand

30 The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. 31 Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.” 32 So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.

- **Make sure that you rest after an intensive time of work and/or ministry.**
 - The disciples had been on a nationwide ministry trip. They returned with stories of both revivals and persecutions. They must have been exhausted. But when they returned it didn't stop. So many people were clamouring for their attention that they were missing meals. Jesus intervened and invited them to get away with him for some rest.
 - Today, we must learn to rest. We would be wise to schedule a few days of rest after a season of great stress and intensity. The best way to rest is to get away from all the demands, to calm down and to spend time with Jesus.
 - In the coming verse we will see that their plans to rest were interrupted and it never happened. This reminds us that rest is something we should pursue but not get bent out of shape if it doesn't happen. In those times, we should dig deep and trust Christ for the grace we need to carry on, weary as we may feel.

33 But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. 34 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

- **The best gift you can give to people is God's word.**
 - Jesus saw a large crowd and was filled with compassion for them. He noticed that they needed shepherding. So what did he do? Did he sign them up for a social welfare programme? Did he schedule some counselling time with them? No, he taught them. He spoke God's word to them.
 - Today, what we all need – more than anything – is the word of God preached to us. Nothing else has the power to so nourish, free, equip and guide our lives. To the degree that we truly want what is best for us, we will devour God's word. To the degree we want the best for those around us, we will communicate to them God's word.

35 By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. “This is a remote place,” they said, “and it’s already very late. 36 Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.” 37 But he answered, “You give them something to eat.” They said to him, “That would take almost 200 denarii (about a year’s wages)! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?”

- **Expect great things from God and attempt great things for God.**
 - Jesus no doubt planned to perform the miracle recorded in verses 38-44. He saw this as an opportunity to demonstrate the abundant resourcefulness of God’s kingdom, the new thing God was doing in the world through him. As an agent of the kingdom, he was constantly on the lookout for such opportunities.
 - It seems that he wanted his disciples to see the needy situation not just in a logical problem-solving way (which is the way they did see it), but rather through the eyes of faith and kingdom-opportunity. It’s almost as though he first gave them the chance to trust God for a miracle.
 - We mustn’t always assume a logical problem-solving view of things. Rather, our default setting should be a readiness to discern what God might be up to in a situation. Instead of seeing a problem to be solved through human effort, we should be open to the possibility that this is a problem that can be solved through God’s grace and power. We should be ready to expect great things from God and to attempt great things for God. If at times we fail in this, we don’t need to be discouraged – even the disciples often failed to do this.

38 “How many loaves do you have?” he asked. “Go and see.”
When they found out, they said, “Five—and two fish.”
39 Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. 40 So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. 41 Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. 42 They all ate and were satisfied, 43 and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. 44 The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.

- **Christ can use the little you have to accomplish his great purposes through you.**
 - There must have been at least 10 000 people including women and children (we’re told there were 5 000 *men*). After everyone is fed fish and bread there were 12 baskets of food left over. Christ performed an amazing miracle!
 - But what makes this miracle so amazing is two things: 1) *He used the little that the disciples had* (which amounted to five loaves

and two fish). To this day, we mustn't let our little education, our little resources, our little capabilities, or even our little experiences disqualify us from attempting great things for Christ and expecting great things from Christ. This story vividly shows that Christ will take whatever we have, as little as it may seem, and do something with it. The first and most important thing is that we put everything we have, little as it is, in his hands. 2) *The miracle happened in the hands of the disciples, not in the hands of Jesus.* The first thing they did was to put it in the hands of Jesus, but then he put it back in their hands. It was as the disciples handed out the bread and fish that the miraculous multiplication happened. Today, we can trust Christ to multiply the little we have to accomplish something great. It's not like we just pray and then Jesus does the miracle. No, as this story shows, often it's as we obediently do the will of God with diligence and faith, that we experience God doing supernatural things through us in the lives of others.

- The main point of this event is that Christ is the Messiah-king.
 - This story is full of clues that Jesus hoped the disciples would pick up on (verse 52 will show us that they missed it however). Let's look at these clues:
 - Mark mentioned three times that this large gathering of people happened in the desert or wilderness (v31,32 and 35). Did this echo another event?
 - Jesus saw that they were like sheep without a shepherd (v34). Throughout the Old Testament, kings are described as the shepherds of their people. We have just seen that Herod is doing a poor job of being king, and these people need a king who actually cares about them. But who?
 - Jesus organized the people into groups of fifties and hundreds (v40). Was this just a bit of logistics or did it mean something?
 - He fed them all (v42). Again, did this echo another event?
 - What did these clues point to? They pointed to the fact that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah-king. Let me explain why:
 - The Israelites had also once gathered in the thousands in a desert.
 - During that time Moses prayed for a leader for the people "so that the Lord's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd" (Numbers 27:17). Jesus was this leader, this king, this shepherd. Jesus even led them to green grass (v39), much like a shepherd would do for his sheep.
 - In that wilderness time Moses appointed men to be in charge of groups of hundreds and fifties (see Exodus 18:21).
 - At that time manna fell from the sky to feed the people. God supernaturally fed the people.
 - The point is this: Jesus is the fulfilment of Israel's hopes. Israel had long been waiting for the Messiah, the one who would usher in the new age of the kingdom. Jesus, greater than Moses even (and

certainly greater than king Herod mentioned in the previous story), was that Messiah. He was full of power, full of love and ushering in the restoring, providing and liberating kingdom of God into this world. It's only in Mark 8 that the disciples will eventually grasp that he is the Messiah, but already now Jesus is dropping hints, so to speak, but they're missing them entirely.

- Christ the earth's true king, was long exiled by the rebellion of humanity, but returned to take his rightful place in the person of Jesus. Still today his kingdom grows despite the resistance of sinful human hearts. But eventually his kingdom will overcome all resistance, either through grace (if we repent and believe) or through judgment (if we fail to repent and believe).

JESUS AND THE DIFFICULTIES WE FACE (6:45-55)

Jesus walks on the water

45 Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. 46 After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray.

- **The busier you get the more you need to pray.**
 - Jesus had hoped to get away to go pray in verse 31, but we see in verse 33 that a surprise gathering of thousands made it impossible. But at the end of the day Jesus knew that he had to spend time alone with his Father to pray. So he dismissed the crowd and sent his disciples away. He understood that if he was always available to every person who made a ministry demand on him, eventually he wouldn't have much to offer anyone. So he pro-actively got alone to pray. He also must have been exhausted physically, but he knew that in this situation he needed prayer more than he needed sleep.
 - The lesson for us today is clear: regardless of the demands we face, we need the courage to often get away and spend time with God. Nothing can so restore our souls as this. Besides, if we are always available to people eventually we will not have anything to give them from God. It's in prayer that we find the resources we need to give people in ministry. (If you're not persuaded that this is true, notice how in the coming day ((recorded in verses 53-56)) how powerfully Jesus would minister. It seems that Mark draws attention to Jesus' pattern of "public ministry followed by private prayer followed by public ministry" so as to persuade us that *prayer really is the secret of power in ministry.*)

47 When evening came, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. 48 He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them.

- Christ is watching your obedience even when you feel it's not getting you anywhere.
 - We see that Jesus instructed his disciples to get into the boat and head for Bethsaida. But they were straining against the wind. They must have felt desperate. Little did they know that the one who had instructed them to take the journey was watching. In the words of Spurgeon: "The apostolic crew rowed, and rowed, and rowed, and it was no fault of theirs that they made no progress, 'for the wind was contrary unto them.' The Christian man may make little or no headway, and yet it may be no fault of his, for the wind is contrary. Our good Lord will take the will for the deed, and reckon our progress, not by our apparent advance, but by the hearty intent with which we tug at the oars."

Shortly before dawn he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, 49 but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, 50 because they all saw him and were terrified. Immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." 51 Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down.

- Christ is with you in your difficulties even when you fail to realize it.
 - Many devotional writers have spoken of "the dark night of the soul". It describes those times in our lives when it seems that Christ has abandoned us, and especially when we needed him most. We feel all alone as we face an adversity that threatens to destroy us. The disciples probably felt the same. They were used to the comforting presence of Jesus with them, but this time he had abandoned them when they needed him most.
 - And over and above this they thought they saw a ghost! But it wasn't a ghost at all. It was Jesus. It turns out that Jesus, obviously motivated by compassion, had gone out to them, walking on water. It turns out that Christ, far from turning his back on them, was moving towards them all the time. And he joined them. What a relief it must have been to have Christ in the boat with them.
 - When we face the dark night of the soul let us draw strength from this event. Christ watches. Christ moves towards us. Though we may fail to recognize his presence, he is with us. Soon enough the storm will subside and Christ's calming presence will again fill us with the strength, assurance and courage we need. Wait patiently.

They were completely amazed, 52 for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.

- Until you realize that Jesus is the Messiah-king you will be overly amazed by the miracles he performed (and still performs).
 - Jesus kept on doing amazing miracles. The day before he had fed thousands with a mere five loaves and two fish. But all the miracles pointed to something, and it appears that the disciples were missing it all. The main point was that the long-awaited Messiah who would usher in the new age of the kingdom had actually arrived – and it was Jesus. Only in Mark 8 will they eventually have their eyes opened to this, but for now their hearts seemed to be hardened to the possibility. The give-away miracle that oozed clues to the fact that he was the Messiah had occurred just the day before – the feeding of the thousands (see the second point in the commentary under verses 38-44 for more). If they had realized that Jesus is the Messiah-king then they wouldn't have been so amazed by this miracle of water-walking. As long as they thought that Jesus was a mere rabbi used by God, or merely a prophet or a miracle-worker, they would fail to grasp the true identity and size of the person they were following. And that's what was happening.

53 When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. 54 As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. 55 They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. 56 And wherever he went—into villages, towns or countryside—they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed.

- After the difficulty comes the blessing.
 - Mark has told us of two storms that the disciples endured: the one in 4:35-41 and the one mentioned in 6:45-51. But notice that Mark also tells how immediately after these difficult faith-testing times came a season of great success and blessing. (Mark 5 tells of the amazing miracles that happened in the day immediately following the storm; and these verses (v53-56) speak of great kingdom advancement in the coming days.)
 - Draw courage from this pattern: after persevering through the difficulties we can expect greater ministry fruitfulness. It seems that Christ uses the difficulties we face to prepare us for the blessing that follows.

Mark Chapter Seven

Colour-code summary: the four main ways God speaks to us through the Gospels...

Blue = something about Jesus' uniqueness and Lordship that shows he is worthy of our devotion, trust and surrender

Green = something about Jesus' character or ministry that we can imitate

Red = something Jesus taught that we can understand or apply to our lives

Orange = insights we can apply based on the way various people responded to him

RELIGIOSITY VERSUS TRUE CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY (7:1-23)

That which defiles

1 The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus 2 and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. 3 (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. 4 When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.)

5 So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?"

- Different cultures and religions create different rituals and customs that people of that culture or religion are expected to obey.
 - In verse 1 we see that a delegation of Pharisees and theological experts were sent all the way from Jerusalem to critique the ministry of Jesus. It appears that they had made up their minds beforehand that he was a bad man that would bring harm to the people of Israel.
 - The Pharisees and the theological experts were a very religious bunch. They taught and modelled that all Jews should seek to be a good Jew, a Jew that is pure and holy, and not corrupted by sin. This seemed good enough, but the problem is how they measured "a good Jew". Tragically, like so many cultures and religions, they created a long list of petty superstitious practices that showed that you were different, committed and pure. Ritualistic hand washing (which was not essentially about hygiene but rather about being pure, and being a good Jew) was an example.
 - Where did this law come from? It seems that they reasoned that since priests needed to ceremonially clean themselves before entering the tabernacle that a good Jew would also ceremonially clean himself before doing many things, such as eating. As trite as this may sound to us, many Jews had even been martyred because of their refusal to eat food without first cleaning their hands. So it was accepted as right and good for all Jews to do, and certainly something God would want all to do.

- But Jesus didn't believe that God wanted Jews to wash their hands before they ate, so he led his disciples to ignore that cultural law. And this is where the conflict raged. It seemed in the eyes of this delegation that Jesus was not a good Jew, and he was disobedient to God.
- Today, we must be weary of doing things just because people insist that "God wants it done" and "it shows you're a good Christian". We should rather check out in God's word whether it really needs to be done, and try to discern what motivates people to do this.

6 He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:

" 'These people honour me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.

- It is possible to do and say all the right things but to do it for the wrong reasons.
 - Jesus responds to their question (in verse 5) with a quote from Isaiah 29:13).
 - It seems that the goal of the Pharisees was to do and say all the right things, but they had lost sight of the far more important reality: intimacy with and heart-devotion to God. They spoke highly about God and they spoke reverently to God, but the problem was that their hearts were not hungry for and loving toward God at all.
 - Jesus called them "hypocrites" which simply means "mask-wearing actors". Jesus had probably been exposed to the theatre in a town near to Nazareth where he grew up and could have seen dramas that consisted of mask-wearing actors. He used them as a metaphor of people who do and say all the right things but on the inside there is something else happening. In other words he was saying that they were more motivated by looking religious and earning respect as a godly person than they were about knowing and pleasing God. They were more interested in projecting an image than they were about intimacy with God.
 - Today, we face the same danger. We can do and say all the rights things but we can be motivated by the wrong things, such as a desire to look godly to others and earn a reputation of spirituality. Christ insists that a deep-heart love for and knowledge of God is what should motivate us to say and do the right things.

7 They worship me in vain;

their teachings are merely human rules.' [Isaiah 29:13]

8 You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions."

- It's possible to think that you're obeying and promoting God's will when you're just obeying and promoting the rules of a religious subculture.
 - Jesus insisted that the kind of Jewish life and faith that the Pharisees practised and promoted was really a deviation from the original life and faith taught in the Scriptures. It seems that they were more devoted to defending the convictions of their religious subculture than they were about finding out and living out the clear teachings of the Scriptures.
 - Today, it's possible for us to have a list of all the things that a good Christian should do, and somehow to come up with a list that is more reflective of the values of our current religious subculture than of what the New Testament clearly teaches us. This obviously doesn't mean that our religious subculture is wrong on every point, but we must explore the Scriptures and find out from it what *really* makes a good Christian in God's eyes. The Bible not our context's latest spin on Christianity should be the source of our convictions, values and practices.

9 And he continued, "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe (or 'set up') your own traditions! 10 For Moses said, 'Honour your father and mother' [Exodus 20:12], and, 'Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death' [Exodus 21:17]. 11 But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is Corban (that is, devoted to God)— 12 then you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother. 13 Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that."

- It's possible to find religious excuses to disobey the clear teachings of the Bible.
 - The thing about man-made religion is that many small inconveniences and sacrifices are imposed on its followers, but no significantly large sacrifices are called for, especially those that cut against the grain of our selfishness.
 - This was the case of the Pharisees. They were willing to wash their hands before every meal – and sometimes even before courses – but they weren't willing to financially support their parents. Exodus 20:12 clearly taught that parents should be honoured and by implication should be supported in their old age. But instead of doing this, they introduced a religious practice whereby you could simply say the word, "Corban" over your possessions, thereby saying that they now belong to God not to them. But here was the trick: they could still use what now belonged to God, but it was no longer theirs to give away.
 - Today, we're in danger of a faith that inconveniences us very shallowly, just enough to make us feel like we're "good Christians" but to not live out the more consuming instructions like expressing God's love and justice in the world. And, somehow

or other we will find a few verses (taken out of context no doubt) and a few one-liners that will justify our disobedience.

14 Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. 15-16 Nothing outside you can defile you by going into you. Rather, it is what comes out of you that defiles you.”

17 After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. 18 “Are you so dull?” he asked. “Don’t you see that nothing that enters you from the outside can defile you? 19 For it doesn’t go into your heart but into your stomach, and then out of your body.” (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.) 20 He went on: “What comes out of you is what defiles you. 21 For from within, out of your hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, 22 adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. 23 All these evils come from inside and defile you.”

- **It’s possible to embrace a religiosity that never really penetrates and transforms the heart.**
 - We must remember that Jesus’ neglect of the petty rules of the Pharisees was jeopardising his safety (see 3:6). So, to take the explosive edge off what he was saying, he introduced them to a short saying (recorded in verses 15 and 16) to make his point.
 - Later he explains: things like a failure to wash your hands or to avoid certain forbidden foods can’t really corrupt and defile us in the sight of God (v18-19). But what can and does corrupt us in God’s sight is what is already in us: the sinfulness in our hearts, in the depth of our beings. Jesus describes 13 kinds of evil that find their origin in our hearts (v20-23). Commenting on these verses Spurgeon says, “The source from which these rivers of pollution proceed is the natural heart of man. Sin is not a splash of mud upon man’s exterior, it is a filth generated within himself.”
 - What was so wrong with the Pharisee’s emphasis on purification washings? According to Jesus it wrongly created the impression that you could somehow become a more godly person through a little external ritual, whereas he was pursuing a far deeper godliness, a godliness of the heart. Although he didn’t at this stage tell us how this deep godliness would come about, he made it clear that we needed to first acknowledge how deeply corrupted our own hearts really are.
 - Jesus was saying that it’s possible to have a kind of religiosity that doesn’t penetrate or transform us deep in our hearts. And if it fails to do that, then it really is worthless. We mustn’t miss what a radical statement Jesus is making here. William Barclay comments, “Although it may not seem so to us now, this passage, when it was first spoken, was well-nigh the most revolutionary passage in the New Testament.”

- **Jesus subtly over-ruled the food laws that Moses had given Israel.**
 - In verse 19, Jesus said, “For it doesn’t go into your heart but into your stomach, and then out of your body.” Mark commented on this adding, “In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.”
 - We have already seen how in 2:28 Jesus declared himself Lord of the Sabbath. Now he does the same about the food laws that were so part of the belief system of the Jews, because of their obedience to the law of Moses.
 - Jesus wasn’t overtly saying that the food laws no longer mattered, but he was saying that in ‘seed-form’ - meaning that a thought was planted that would later develop in their minds. That is what happened. Later on, after he left, his disciples realized that Jesus was in fact setting them free from the law of Moses entirely. No doubt Peter would have remembered this teaching of Christ when, much later, he would have a heavenly vision that convinced him that there is no such thing as a food that defiles you (see Acts 10:9-15).

- **You’re a sinner in desperate need of a Saviour who can set you free from both the guilt and the power of your sin.**
 - Just think how sinful the Pharisees were. They were highly critical of Jesus possibly because of how jealous and bitter they were because of his success. And yet they felt great about themselves because, unlike Jesus and his disciples, they always washed their hands. Jesus’ point in verses 21-23 that the human heart is deeply corrupted was so evident even in them, the so-called “righteous” people of the day. And if there’s no hope for the so-called righteous people, then nor is there hope for those who know that they are unrighteous.
 - It seems that Jesus touches us at the point of our sin, and then leaves us hanging. It should cause us to ask, “Then what is the solution?” How do we deal with the sinfulness – its power and its guilt – in our hearts? And, of course, that’s where this Gospel is going. If we fast-forward, we know that Jesus died and rose again from the dead, and in so doing has provided two gifts to those who trust him: the gift of forgiveness (where our hearts are wiped clean of guilt) and the gift of new life (where we are given a new heart, a new centre, and a new well-spring of godly desire)!

JESUS PERFORMS A MIRACLE FOR TWO DIFFERENT GENTILES (7:24-35)

In verse 19 above we see that Jesus was challenging the very way that Jews saw the world: clean versus unclean. The mentality of the first century Jew was to refuse to make contact with anything unclean, whether it was a kind of food, or whether it was a sick person, or whether it was a Gentile. It comes then as no co-incidence that his next two miracles are performed for Gentiles. He was showing that, with regard to the coming of his kingdom, it was not the clean (that which pleased God) which was corrupted by the unclean (that which was believed to displease God) but rather that the

clean (in this case Jesus) could in fact restore the so-called unclean (in this case the Gentiles).

Jesus honours a Syrophenician woman's faith

24 Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. 25 In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an evil spirit came and fell at his feet. 26 The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.

27 "First let the children eat all they want," he told her, "for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."

- [Jesus came first as Messiah to the Jews and then as Messiah to the world.](#)
 - Things were heating up for Jesus. His family and home town had rejected him (6:3). Herod had become suspicious of him (6:16). The Pharisees and teachers of the law were after him with murderous intent (3:6 and 7:1). So he decided to lay low a while and went about 100 km north of Galilee to Tyre, a Gentile region (v24). He also probably took this as an opportunity to let his disciples feed on him, so to speak (v27).
 - A Gentile woman heard he was in town and pleaded with him to set her daughter free from a demon (v26).
 - His response is fascinating: "First let the children eat all they want for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs" (v27).
 - He effectively says "no". He does it with a bit of humorous, teasing banter that she is after all, a little (the Greek adds the diminutive) "dog". In that day Jews called Gentiles dogs. The fact that he calls her a "little" dog is a form of affection and playfulness not insult upon insult. It turns out that Jesus wasn't as politically correct as we may have thought. Notice Jesus' humour!
 - Why did Jesus say bread was for the children? What did he mean? The children referred to the Jews of Israel, the children of Abraham. Jesus understood his earthly mission as being a Messiah to the Jews (see Matthew 15:24). Of course, his long-range plan was to be Messiah to all the nations of the world (which is why Mark records that it would be a Gentile man who would recognize that Jesus is the Messiah when he was crucified (see Mark 15:39)). But his immediate plan was to redeem the nation of Israel. Only once he had been crucified and exalted, and, ruling from heaven, had begun to pour out his Spirit, would he broaden his focus to the entire world. That's why he tells the woman that he is focussed on the children for now.

- (As a side note on this point, we can learn from Christ the importance of focus. Once we know what it is we're meant to do, we will also know what it is we're *not* meant to do. As in this story, this doesn't mean we rigidly refuse all opportunities outside of our focus, but most times we certainly must refuse all opportunities that could side-track us from our central priority and call.)

28 “Lord,” she replied, “even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” 29 Then he told her, “For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.” 30 She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

- **Move the powerful arm of Christ in prayer.**
 - John Wesley said that prayer is the slender nerve that moves the powerful arm of Christ. We have a helpful picture of effective prayer in these verses. We can learn from her example of prayer in several ways:
 - *Though Jesus delays the answer to our prayer, we should persist in prayer.* In Luke 18:1 Jesus taught that we should always pray and not give up. Here we see a woman doing just that. Jesus, as we have seen in the point above, basically had said no to her request. But notice that she refuses to accept his no. She persists with words to the effect of, ‘Yes, Lord but...’ (v28).
 - *We should argue with God on the basis of his mercy.* As Michael Eaton says, “Great faith always reasons with God. It may argue with God using his promises. Or it may argue with God on the basis of his character.” This is exactly what the woman does here. She turns Jesus’ picture of a father giving the bread to the children not the dog around by saying that a merciful father will still scatter at least a few crumbs to the dogs too.
 - *We should pray with faith and humility.* Although the words “faith” and “humility” are not found in these verses, it’s clear that this woman had a rich supply of both. The fact that she fell at his feet (v25) demonstrates humility. The fact that she even approached him at all shows faith.
 - *We should pray until assurance comes.* Great intercessors often give the counsel that we should persevere in asking God for something until we sense God speaking to our hearts with assurance that our prayers have been answered, and at that point we can stop asking and start thanking in advance for the answer to our prayer. This woman did just that. She kept on asking until Jesus gave her assurance of an answer to her prayer (v29).

Jesus heals a deaf and mute man

31 Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. 32 There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on him.

33 After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. 34 He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means "Be opened!"). 35 At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.

36 Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. 37 People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

- **If you minister in healing power, be ready to adjust your ministry method as the Spirit leads and as the occasion necessitates.**
 - Christ can use any believer to minister healing to another. And we all need to be available to him if he were to choose to do so. However, the Bible shows that certain people are gifted by God to move in healing power far more regularly. These people can learn so much from Christ about how to minister healing to people.
 - One of the most notable things is that every healing of Christ was distinct from all the rest:
 - Sometimes he healed because of the faith of the person who received the healing. Sometimes it was the faith of the friends or family of the person. And sometimes it seems Christ exercised the faith (as Michael Eaton argues) to heal people.
 - Sometimes he approached people to heal them. Sometimes they approached him and he healed them. Sometimes other people approached Jesus on behalf of the sick.
 - Usually Jesus healed people who were in front of him, but sometimes he healed people from a distance.
 - Sometimes he healed people through a touch, and sometime there was no touch. Sometimes he healed people with a word and sometimes there was no word. It's interesting that Jesus never asked the Father to heal – he rather commanded a healing (however James 5:14,15 shows that it's normal for Christians to ask God to heal people).
 - Sometimes he employed unusual methods in his healing as he did here. It seems that he was led by the Spirit differently on different occasions. In this situation he can't talk to the man, so he uses touch (he touches the tongue which needs to start speaking, and the ears which need to start hearing) to help the man have faith for what Christ is

doing. Eaton suggests that Jesus' spitting signals to the man that he intends to get the man's tongue working. He also looks up to heaven to let the man know that the healing power is from above. And he sighs in such a way that his facial expression communicates to the deaf man the sheer volume and intensity of his healing word.

- Today, we must be weary of trusting in any one method for healing but be open to the unique leading of the Spirit, as well as the unique situation as we seek to minister healing to people.
- **The recorded healings of Jesus in the gospels are amazingly encouraging to us today.**
 - Every time we read of a healing that Christ performed while on earth we can be encouraged in several different ways:
 - *1) The healings of Christ encourage us that, since the coming of Christ, we live in the new age of the kingdom of God.* (See commentary under 1:14-16 for more.) This particular healing is a fulfilment of Isaiah 35:5-6 which promised that the opening of blind eyes, the unstopping of deaf ears and the singing of once-mute tongues would characterize the presence of the kingdom age. The kingdom is here. God is doing a new thing, ever since Jesus' coming. What a wonderful time to be alive!
 - *2) The healings of Christ in the gospels encourage us to expect Christ to still heal people today.* All the miracles of Jesus were signs that the new age of the kingdom had begun and was breaking into the present age. Still today, Christ (who is the same yesterday, today and forever) and his kingdom are here and continue to break in.
 - *3) The recorded healings in the gospels encourage us by giving us a preview of our heavenly resurrection bodies.* All those who trust in Christ will ultimately receive resurrection bodies in the new heaven and new earth, when his kingdom has fully come! Although our bodies are prone to sickness and decay in this life, in the next Jesus will heal and restore us completely and eternally!
 - *4) Christ's healings encourage us to trust in Christ's loving ability to powerfully intervene in every area of our lives and situations.* A healing is a clear evidence of Christ's intervention for the good of a person – and each healing tells us that Christ is willing and able to intervene for our good in all the other areas of our lives as well. If he can do the most difficult thing, namely heal our bodies, then he certainly can intervene for good in our emotions, our relationships, our situation, our finances and so much more.
 - Verse 37 tells us that the people in his day were overwhelmed by amazement at Jesus. Still today, the healings we read of in the gospels can have the same effect on us! Surely Christ does everything well!

Mark Chapter Eight

Colour-code summary: the four main ways God speaks to us through the Gospels...

Blue = something about Jesus' uniqueness and Lordship that shows he is worthy of our devotion, trust and surrender

Green = something about Jesus' character or ministry that we can imitate

Red = something Jesus taught that we can understand or apply to our lives

Orange = insights we can apply based on the way various people responded to him

THE LOAVES AND THE YEAST (8:1-21)

Jesus feeds the four thousand

1 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.

- **Care about the overall welfare of people in our world.**
 - The sharp edge of what Jesus was doing was spiritual. Steadily the gospel of Mark is moving toward the cross, where Jesus purchased forgiveness and salvation for humankind. That's why as Christians by far our greatest concern is the spiritual welfare of the people in our world.
 - But when we look at Jesus' example here, we realize that Jesus had a more holistic vision. Of course Jesus cares about the spiritual welfare of every person in this world, but that does not mean he doesn't care about the overall welfare of people.
 - In this event we see him full of compassion (v2) for a large crowd of people – many of them non-Jews (since he's still in the region of Tyre and Sidon). But Jesus doesn't just have compassion for them. He also tries to get his disciples to share his concern for them (v3). And more than that he suggests that the disciples need to do something about it (v5).
 - Still today in an age of poverty, hunger and injustice, Christ wants us, his disciples, to share his deep-felt concern for the overall welfare of people in the world. And still today he asks us to do something about it.

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 set before 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. And having sent them away, 10 he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha.

- **Christ's track record of faithfulness towards us should cause us to be full of faith for his future faithfulness.**
 - It has probably only been a few weeks or months since Christ miraculously provided for the 5000 (see 6:33-44). Now, a similar situation arises and Christ again comes to the disciples and asks them what can be done. Of course, the response he was hoping for was, "Jesus, you have fed more people than this before. Can you not miraculously provide again?" But that's not how they respond at all. Verse 4 shows that it doesn't even cross their minds. Sadly, they had forgotten about what Christ had done in the past, and because of that failed to trust him to do it again.
 - Similarly today, most whole-hearted disciples of Jesus can honestly look back and see the track record of the goodness of Christ in their lives (after all Jesus promised this in Matthew 6:33). But sadly, we so often forget Jesus' grace and provision for us up till now, and when a challenge arises we don't trust him to graciously intervene and provide again. Let us look back and remember, and then look forward and trust.

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.

- **Christ generally doesn't do miracles when there's an unwillingness to believe.**
 - Verse 12 tells us that Jesus sighed or groaned in deep frustration. What frustrated him so much? It seems he was frustrated by the sheer hardness of heart in the Pharisees. In spite of all the signs he'd already given them, they asked for an even more spectacular sign. They were "testing" him (v11). But Jesus refused. After all, his miracles were not done with the intention of convincing hardened non-believers. Instead his miracles demonstrated his mercy and his power to people who were, generally speaking, ready to believe.
 - Today, Christ doesn't perform miracles to overcome an unwillingness to believe. Rather miracles seem to flow where there is a readiness to believe.

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."

- Beware of having your view of God and what he's doing in the world tainted by the culture, rather than formed by Christ and the Scriptures.
 - Both the Pharisees and Herod had two things in common. Firstly, they had already made up their minds about Jesus and refused to humbly trust in him. Secondly, they had a radically different kingdom-vision to Jesus. The Pharisees it seems were hoping for a political liberator Messiah who would set the nation free from the power of Rome and its corrupting influences. Herod himself was hoping to be seen as part of a line of loved Jewish kings who caused the nation to prosper under his leadership. (Of course, he was too self-absorbed to ever become such a king.)
 - Jesus warned his disciples against the “yeast” of Herod and the Pharisees. By yeast he means “subtle influences”. When he told his disciples to be careful of the influence of Herod and the Pharisees it was as though he were saying, “Be careful that you don't tend towards unbelief (and prematurely make up your mind about me), and be careful that you don't think the coming kingdom of God is primarily a political one led by a literal, political Messiah.” In other words he was warning them not to have their hearts or their thinking about what God was doing corrupted or distorted by the Pharisees and Herod.
 - Today, we need to make sure that we aren't corrupted by the prevailing culture's scepticism, and view of what God is up to in this world. In the Western context, if we fail to be careful about this danger, we will tend to become increasingly unbelieving, perhaps rejecting the idea of God and the supernatural altogether, or sentimental about God, perhaps thinking, “God just wants to make this world a better place for all to live in.” Of course, if we start thinking like this it shows that it is our culture, not Christ and the Scriptures, that is shaping our heart-attitudes and belief systems about God.

16 They discussed this with one another and said, “It is because we have no bread.” 17 Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: “Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? 18 Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember? 19 When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?” “Twelve,” they replied. 20 “And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?” They answered, “Seven.” 21 He said to them, “Do you still not understand?”

- Jesus longs for us to discover who he was and is.
 - The main revelation that Jesus wanted the disciples to have was that he was the long-awaited Messiah of Israel and of the world. But he took an unusual approach to getting this message across: instead of just coming out and telling them, he gave them clue after clue in his teachings, and in his miracles. Two repeat

miracles in particular (the feeding of the 5000 and the feeding of the 4000) were full of signs that he was the Messiah (see the point in the commentary of 6:38-44 that says, “The main point of this event is that Jesus is the Messiah-king”).

- He was encouraging them to reflect on those two miracles. He was urging them to open their spiritual eyes and ears to see and hear what they need to see and hear. He challenged them with the question, “Do you still not understand?”
- Today, still – even though a person can hear the words, “Jesus is the Son of God, Jesus is the Christ / Messiah of the world,” they can still take a long time to really “get” it, to see it for themselves. But, if we follow the “clues” that he leaves us, it soon becomes clear enough.

THE MIRACLE OF OPENED EYES (8:22-30)

Jesus heals a blind man at Bethsaida

22 They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. 23 He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man’s eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, “Do you see anything?” 24 He looked up and said, “I see people; they look like trees walking around.” 25 Once more Jesus put his hands on the man’s eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. 26 Jesus sent him home, saying, “Don’t even go into the village.”

- **Sometimes Jesus heals progressively and not instantly.**
 - Verses 22-26 tell us the only account of Jesus healing someone progressively rather than instantly. We see a two-stage healing.
 - When praying for Christ to heal people today we can learn from Christ some things: Sometimes it’s good to get alone with the person we’re praying for (v23). We can ask people if anything is happening as we pray for them (v23). We can be encouraged by even partial results (v24). We can persevere until the healing is complete (v25).
 - Why did he put spit on the man’s eyes? Possibly this was just a very practical thing to do – chances are that his eyelids were stuck together with gum, and they needed to be opened up. The real miracle, however, was the restoration of sight. Also possibly, this was just another spontaneous method of ministering healing as the Spirit led him.

Peter declares that Jesus is the Messiah

27 Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, “Who do people say I am?” 28 They replied,

“Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” 29 “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Messiah.” 30 Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

- It takes a miracle for us to see who Jesus really was and is.
 - These two stories (verses 22-26 and verses 27-30) are the climax revelation of the gospel of Mark. They serve as the turning point of the entire story.
 - The most important thing to see is how Mark puts these stories – the opening of a man’s physical eyes and the opening of the disciples’ spiritual eyes – side by side.
 - Notice the parallel between the opening of the one man’s physical eyes and the opening of the disciples’ spiritual eyes:
 - *Both the man and the disciples were blind.* The man was blind (v22) and the disciples were blind (in verse 18 Jesus told the disciples they were spiritually blind to who he was and what was happening).
 - *Jesus took both away from the crowds to restore their sight.* He took the blind man outside the village (v23). And he took the disciples eastward to Caesarea Philippi on a several-day journey (v27).
 - *He progressively opened their eyes.* The blind man received a two-stage healing (v24,25). And for two years Jesus had been “dropping hints” through his teachings and miracles that he was the Messiah. The man could only see Jesus clearly after the second stage of healing. And the disciples could only see Jesus clearly after the second year of travelling with Christ.
 - *He asked them what they saw.* He asked the blind man what he could see (v23). And he asked the disciples how they saw him (twice, in fact, in verses 27 and 29). (To understand the disciples’ answer to Jesus in verse 28, see the commentary on 6:14-16.)
 - *He asked both to keep the miracle of their new “vision” a secret.* The blind man was warned not to tell anyone (v26) as were the disciples (v30).
 - Wonderfully, we see how all the miracles of Christ point to this pivotal revelation: Jesus is the Christ. Jesus is the Messiah.)
 - The point Mark is making by putting these stories side by side is this: it takes a miracle for the human heart to see who Jesus really is and was, a miracle of spiritual sight. That’s why Matthew tells us that Jesus responded to their confession of him as Messiah like this, “Blessed are you for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.” (Matthew 16:17)

- **Jesus didn't want his disciples, or anyone, to prematurely identify him as Messiah.**
 - Verse 30 says that Jesus warned the disciples not to tell anyone about their newfound revelation that Jesus was the Messiah.
 - Why was Jesus so secretive about the fact that he was the Messiah? It's because he didn't want to prematurely let people know that he was claiming to be the Messiah because that would almost certainly get the attention of the Pharisees and Herod and the Caesar of Rome, who would very quickly put an end to him (and his time had not yet come). After all, the prevailing understanding of the Messiah was a man who would overthrow Roman oppression, powerfully rebuild the Temple and restore the nation to great justice and prosperity under his unrivalled rule. No wonder the powers of the day would have moved strongly in on anyone claiming to be such a man.
 - But why did Jesus not tell his disciples earlier that he was the Messiah? It seems that he wanted his disciples to discover that he was the Messiah, rather than simply be told that he was the Messiah. It seems that Jesus knew that when a person discovers something they are far more likely to own that truth than if someone merely tells them. What a joy it must have been for Jesus when, a few days or weeks later, "the penny finally dropped" in the heart of one them (v29).

THE CROSS-CENTRED LIFE (8:31-38)

Jesus predicts his death

31 He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

- **Amazingly, Jesus the Great King is also Jesus the Suffering Servant.**
 - The moment the disciples realized and confessed that Jesus was the Messiah (v29) he took them deeper into his confidence, and introduced a new emphasis in his teaching, namely his coming death (v31).
 - Jesus, in 2:10, had already called himself "the Son of Man". The phrase meant two things. Firstly, it simply meant a "human being". But secondly, and this is the meaning Jesus picks up on, he implies that he is the fulfilment of Daniel 7:13, which speaks of a human being "coming with the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of Days" and there receiving power, glory and authority to rule all the nations of the world forever. In fact, it was descriptions like these that made many people expect the Messiah to be one who would set up a political kingdom. William Barclay said that this description made many people of Jesus' day think the Messiah would be "a great, super-human figure crashing into history to

remake the world and in the end to vindicate God's people, being the most destructive conqueror in history, smashing his enemies into utter extinction". In other words, in the minds of people the Messiah was to be overwhelmingly great and powerful.

- But Jesus did something shocking. He claimed to be this great Son of Man but then, in the same breath, said that he would suffer, be rejected and killed. That would be the equivalent of a person running for presidency and near the end of their campaign saying, "But I must first lose the vote and be killed."
- When he said that he would be rejected and would suffer and die, Jesus was referring to other less-attractive prophecies about the Messiah, the passages that people typically overlooked, prophecies like Isaiah 53, which speaks of the Suffering Servant, the person who experiences the greatest humiliation before they experience the greatest exaltation.
- And that was Jesus' point: the real Messiah is the fulfilment of both Daniel 7 (the great Son of Man) and Isaiah 53 (the Suffering Servant). He combined both identities in himself. He is both the Lion of Judah, roaring with unrivalled authority, and the Lamb of God, helplessly being led to his terrible death.

32 He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

- **Be careful not to unknowingly undermine what God is doing.**
 - Jesus had just days or weeks before warned the disciples about being corrupted by the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod (see commentary on 8:14,15). It turns out that Peter had been corrupted in that he was ready to embrace a Messiah who was the Great King, but not a Messiah who was also the Suffering Servant. He had subtly been influenced by the culture of his day's vision of the Messiah.
 - It's fascinating that just minutes before Peter had received and communicated a profound revelation from God (v29 and Matthew 16:17). But not moments later, he receives and communicates a deceptive revelation from the devil himself, which also happened to be the mindset of the day; that Jesus doesn't need to go to the cross at all.
 - Interestingly, Peter tried to secretly rebuke Jesus (v32) only to be immediately, and publicly, rebuked in return (v33). And Jesus tells him what he got wrong: "You do not have the concerns of God in mind, only human concerns." In other words, Peter was simply not discerning what God was up to, and seemed to approach the subject of Jesus' death from a totally human perspective. (We can imagine him whispering to Jesus, "Jesus, you really must stop speaking about suffering and death – you can

avoid that and you're demoralizing us!") And because he failed to discern what God was up to, he was vulnerable to the devil's lie.

- This story should humble us all. Just because there have been times that we have heard God clearly, as Peter had, it doesn't mean that we can't totally misunderstand what God is up to, and without even realizing it, be used by the devil to try undermine what God is doing.

The way of the cross

34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

- **Christ calls you to give your life to him *totally*.**
 - The cross of Jesus is both the way of Christ saving us, and the way of us following Christ. In other words, it serves as the means of salvation and the symbol of discipleship. In this verse Jesus is speaking about how the cross is the symbol of discipleship. Notice a few things about his call to discipleship:
 - 1) *All are invited to be disciples*. Notice that he isn't just speaking to the disciples but to the crowds as well. The word "whoever" is totally inclusive of everyone.
 - 2) *To be his disciple we need to "deny ourselves"*. Warren Wiersbe comments on this verse: "Denying self is not the same as self-denial. We practice self-denial when, for a good purpose, we occasionally give up things or activities. But we deny self when we surrender ourselves to Christ and determine to obey His will." To deny ourselves also means that, in our quest to follow Christ, we rebel against the offers of the world, the sinful nature, and the devil.
 - 3) *To be his disciple we need to "take up our cross"*. What does this mean? It refers to a willingness to suffer if need be, and a willingness to lay down our lives in love for others:
 - The cross, more than anything else, was a symbol of execution. So Jesus was effectively saying, "come and die with me". Dietrich Boenhoffer said of this verse, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him, 'Come and die.'" Jesus is saying that we need to lay down our lives totally as we trust and obey him. To take up our cross we're willing to suffer and die through martyrdom if need be. (Although most of us will not die as martyrs, according to statistics in 2007, every day over 500 Christians die as martyrs, so these words are as relevant today as ever.)
 - But we need to also remember that the cross is Christ's path of love. Jesus died on the cross because he loved us. And wonderfully, through the cross his life flows toward us. So he didn't waste his life, rather he invested his life in

love. (In John 12:24 Jesus compared his own going to the cross to being a seed planted in the ground in order to “produce many more seeds”.) So when we’re told to “take up our cross” it means lay your life down for the good of others, so that life flows through your life to them.

- 4) *To be his disciple we need to “follow” him.* Michael Eaton says that this simply means “involvement in the work of God’s kingdom”. It means continuing the kingdom-advancing ministry of Jesus in this world.

35 For whoever wants to save their life [or ‘soul’] will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. 36 What good is it for you to gain the whole world, yet forfeit your life (or ‘soul’)? 37 Or what can you give in exchange for your life (or ‘soul’)?

- **The surest way to waste your life is to not follow Jesus.**
 - In verse 31, Jesus said that his own path to resurrection glory and honour as the Son of Man was to go through the suffering and death of the cross. In these verses he is inviting us to experience a similar, but different in many ways, resurrection glory and honour. And he’s telling us that we need to go through the same path as him: the path of “losing our lives” for him and for the advancement of the Gospel (v35).
 - Jesus is making it clear that each one of us has to choose between two paths: 1) the path of radically living our lives for Jesus and the advancement of the Gospel (v35); or 2) the path of pursuing self-preservation (this is what he means by “whoever wants to save their life”) and the temporary things that this world offers (this is what he means by the attempt to “gain the whole world”).
 - In effect, Jesus says it will cost us something to follow him (ie path 1) but it will cost us far more if we don’t (ie path 2). The cost of path 2 is that we will “lose” (v35) and “forfeit” (v36) our very lives. This is not Jesus’ way of saying we’ll go to hell when we die, but rather his way of saying that we’ll waste our precious one-and-only life on this earth. (Notice how Jesus suggests that our lives are worth more than all the wealth in the world (v36) and that life is so valuable that it can’t be measured in monetary terms (v37)).
 - CT Studd, a famous sportsman turned missionary, once said, “Only one life will soon be past, and only what’s done for Christ will last.” Jesus similarly is saying that we should live a life of whole-hearted devotion to him and service to others (advancing the Gospel) rather than a life of self-preservation. He is saying that we should enrich our lives with things of eternal value, rather than diminish our lives with the pursuit of things of only temporary value.

38 If any of you are ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of you when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

- **Fail to honour Christ and he will fail to honour you.**
 - Christ warns us, his disciples, not to be ashamed of him and his words. He gives the reason that we may be tempted to be ashamed of him and the Gospel: the world is sinful and adulterous. In other words, they may not be that excited about our message, our obedience to Christ, or our challenge to them. The word "adulterous" refers to the way people run after lesser things rather than him. Instead of loving God, this world loves things like comfort, money, sex, power, fame, career, family and much more.
 - When will "the Son of Man come in his Father's glory with the angels"? Most people assume this refers to Christ's second coming when he comes from God, however Michael Eaton argues persuasively that it doesn't necessarily mean that. Rather, it's a reference to Daniel 7:13, which doesn't describe the Son of Man coming *from* God, but rather *to* God. In other words, Jesus is most likely referring to his exaltation, when he leaves this earth and approaches God. Of course this has already happened, when Jesus left the earth.
 - So what Jesus is saying in verse 38 is this: "Soon I will be exalted. I won't be with you. However, I will watch over you, eager to see you succeed by promoting the Gospel, and ready to honour and reward you for doing so. But if, because of fear of people, you fail to do so, I will be disappointed, and won't be able to honour and reward you at all."

9:1 And he said to them, "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power."

(9:1 is directly linked to the previous verses so I have included it here)

- **The exaltation of Jesus has enabled us to experience a more powerful phase of his kingdom than was possible even during his earthly ministry.**
 - Two questions surface as read this verse. Firstly, what does Jesus mean when he says, "some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come"? Answer: it's simply a figure of speech that means "within your generation, the kingdom of God will come".
 - Secondly, what does Jesus mean when he says that within this generation many will "see that the kingdom of God has come with power?" Note firstly that Jesus suggested that the kingdom of God hadn't yet come in power. But we know that in 1:14,15 Jesus announced the presence of the kingdom and started

demonstrating its reality by casting out demons and healing the sick. So we have seen the kingdom powerfully coming already! So when Jesus said this (9:1) it's as if he was saying, "You haven't seen anything yet." He was therefore promising that there was another phase in the kingdom that would soon unfold, a phase even more powerful than the one he had introduced in his earthly ministry.

- The key to understanding this verse is to look at the section of verses immediately before. In 8:31 and 38 he spoke of himself as the Son of Man which would make them think of Daniel 7:13. He even quoted part of Daniel 7:13 in 8:38 when he spoke of himself coming in his Father's glory with angels. As stated in the commentary of 8:38, "Most people assume this refers to Christ's second coming when he comes from God, however Michael Eaton argues persuasively that it doesn't necessarily mean that. Rather, it's a reference to Daniel 7:13 which doesn't describe the Son of Man coming *from* God, but rather *to* God. In other words, Jesus is most likely referring to his exaltation, when he leaves this earth and approaches God." The point is this: *Jesus was saying that at the time of his exaltation, his kingdom power would become far more evident to us than it had been while he was on the earth.*
- But was Jesus' promise fulfilled? The answer is a breathtaking, faith-boosting "yes"! Within a year or two, on the Day of Pentecost (spoken of in Acts 2), thousands of people in one day "saw the kingdom of God come with power". On this day the Spirit was poured out and thousands of people were saved! Peter would say of the experience, "Exalted to the right hand of God, Jesus has ... poured out (the Holy Spirit) as you now see and hear" (Acts 2:33). Jesus also described this outpouring beforehand as them receiving "power" (Acts 1:8).
- Still today, every time there is an outpouring of the Spirit and people are saved we can say both that "we have seen the kingdom coming with power" and that "Jesus certainly has been exalted to the right hand of God – just look at the evidence: his power to change lives!"