

# Jesus Messiah: Seeing Christ In The Gospel Of Mark

*“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”  
(Mark 1:15 ESV)*

*And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said,  
“Truly this man was the Son of God!”  
(Mark 15:38–39 ESV)*

## **Adventures In Missing The Point**

**January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2018**

**Mark 9:30-37**

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning. I want to invite you to open your Bibles to Mark 9:30; that’s on page 845 in your pew Bibles.

Behold, God is exalted in his power; who is a teacher like him? (Job 36:22 ESV)

Elihu said that in the Book of Job and we see that illustrated in the passage that we are about to read together. This story is about Jesus teaching, correcting and redirecting the expectations and assumptions of his disciples.

You may recall that Jesus has taken the disciples on a strategic retreat. They left Galilee and spent some time up in the north away from the mounting hostilities and opposition and now they have re-entered the fray so to speak and Jesus has set his face for Jerusalem – that’s why he predicts his death and suffering for a second time in this passage, he’ll do it a third time in Mark 10:32-45 – Jesus is trying to explain to the disciples what his mission is really all about. But the disciples are not getting it – they think Jesus is speaking metaphorically or allegorically here and they don’t understand what this is all about and they go on to express some very contradictory notions about what they think the future will hold for them as followers of Messiah – and Jesus gently, relentlessly, skillfully, authoritatively corrects them and points them back on track.

It's a good passage for us to be looking at today as we are coming back from a time of strategic retreat and we are about to begin a new year of ministry here in Orillia. Now would be a good time to make sure that we are not barking up the wrong tree or chasing down false dreams and wrong ambitions. Now would be a good time to make sure that we are following – truly - in the footsteps of the Master.

So hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 30. This is God's Word to us:

They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he did not want anyone to know, 31 for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise." 32 But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him. 33 And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?" 34 But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. 35 And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." 36 And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, 37 "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me." (Mark 9:30–37 ESV)

This is not a terribly complicated passage in terms of structure. We see two things in this passage, we see the disciples missing the point and we see Jesus getting them back on track. We'll look at both of those and we'll ask of ourselves a few practical and personal questions by way of response and application.

First of all then in verses 32-34:

## **1. We See The Disciples Missing The Point**

And, we should probably point out; they miss it rather badly. Jesus is talking about betrayal, injustice, humiliation and death and the disciples are arguing about the seating arrangements at Messiah's table. They are WAY OFF TRACK here – they aren't even close. James Edwards puts it this way in his commentary, he says:

"The juxtaposition of the two pericopes reveals a jarring contrast between Jesus' humility and the disciples' desire for distinction and recognition."<sup>1</sup>

And by the way, they'll do this again. Just flip forward in your Bibles to Mark 10:32-45. We won't

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<sup>1</sup>James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 285.

read all that, but just look at it. My Bible gives this section the heading: “Jesus Foretells His Death A Third Time”. So for a third time he tells them that he is going to be betrayed, he is going to be condemned, he is going to be humiliated, mocked and scorned and killed and then look at what the disciples are talking about next. Look at verse 35:

And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” 36 And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?” 37 And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” (Mark 10:35–37 ESV)

Jesus, we would like to talk to you a little more about the seating arrangements in the eternal kingdom – are you kidding me? Just look at the verse that comes before this ridiculous request. Look at verse 34; look at what Jesus says will happen to him in just a short period of time. He says:

they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.” (Mark 10:34 ESV)

Mhmm, and where will be sitting at Messiah’s table? That’s their follow up question. Are you kidding me? That is the JARRING CONTRAST that Edwards is talking about. How do you go from mocking, spitting, flogging and killing to the seating arrangements at Messiah’s table? How are you that far off track?

That’s the question right? But before we answer that question , let’s just summarize what we’ve seen. Jesus has been talking about suffering, injustice, death and resurrection – that’s his mission and that’s the trail that he’s blazing – but the disciples don’t understand:

- A. They think its about greatness and glory
- B. They think its about power and authority

Now before we go on to the second part of the passage where Jesus points them back on track, I want to go back to the question I think any thoughtful person is asking at this point in the narrative and that is this:

### **Why Did The Disciples Miss The Point?**

You have to be asking that question. How did they not get this? We want to know because we want

to avoid their error. Remember, that's one of the reasons we read the Bible – the Apostle Paul said:

Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction (1 Corinthians 10:11 ESV)

The stories in the Bible are not there to entertain they are there to educate. So we want to learn from what happens in this story and therefore we want to know why the disciples missed the point. Why did they miss the point so egregiously? They weren't even close! Why was that?

- i. Because they were influenced by cultural assumptions

We've talked about this before. The Jews had an idea about what Messiah would be like and about how he would set up the kingdom. From that it followed that if Jesus was the Messiah and if the disciples were his inner circle then it was reasonable to wonder about the sorts of positions and preferment that would be granted to them in the eternal kingdom. This was in fact a major pre-occupation in the Judaism of Jesus' day. James Edwards again says here:

“Their preoccupation with rank and standing is in character with what we know of Judaism in general.”<sup>2</sup>

If the Jewish assumptions about Messiah were correct then their conversation was entirely appropriate. But here's the thing – they weren't so it wasn't.

The problem was that the disciples were doing their theology with the culture as their starting place; rather than the Scriptures.

How often do we see that in modern day evangelicalism?

Think about the conversation right now around human sexuality. Does that conversation start in the culture or in the Scriptures? It starts in the culture – there is nowhere to begin that conversation in the Bible. There is no verse that suggests that the whole gender thing is open to interpretation. There is no verse that says that the whole human pairing thing is really a matter of personal choice. There is nowhere to begin that conversation in the Bible so the fact that we're having it tells you

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<sup>2</sup>James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 286.

where it came from. It came from the culture. And so now we have invented a sexually permissive Jesus because we have a sexually permissive culture.

There is nothing in the Bible to support that assumption – but we assume it and we discuss it because we have accepted the assumptions of our culture.

That is how you get off track my friends, and Evangelicals are offering the world a PhD course in this particular discipline.

Secondly the disciples got off track:

- ii. Because they were favouring certain emphases within the Old Testament

There was a line of prophetic expectation around themes of kingdom and conquest and prosperity and rule stemming from the promises God made to David in 2 Samuel 7 – a lot of those promises are worked out in the prophetic books that follow. But there is another line of prophetic expectation around a suffering servant and a need for atonement – you see that in places like Isaiah 53 which says:

3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

4 Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.  
5 But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. (Isaiah 53:3–5 ESV)

That's pretty clear – but its not nearly as exciting as the whole kingdom, reign and prosperity bit so it didn't receive nearly as much attention among the scribes and teachers.

You can see the same thing happening today with respect to the prosperity Gospel. Are there texts promising that God's people will enjoy prosperity?

Yes! Absolutely there are. But are there passages that promise suffering, sickness, injustice, delay and disappointment in this life? Yes! Absolutely there are! So how does this all go together? Well its complicated and you have to read the whole Bible to see how it all works out in the end – and that's the point. So many of us aren't reading the whole Bible – we are parking out in our favourite

places and believing things we can only believe by ignoring the rest of what the Bible has to say.

That's how believers get off track – in Jesus' day and in ours.

Alright, the second thing we see in this text we see in verses 35-37. In those verses:

## **2. We See Jesus Getting Them Back On Track**

Thanks be to God!

Jesus knows us – he knows that we are prone to wander, he knows that we are slow to understand, he knows that we are influenced by the culture – so he brings the disciples inside the house, he sits them down and he patiently directs them back toward the narrow way. Isn't that good? Who is a teacher like the Lord? Answer: NO ONE!

Jesus is getting them back on track and he is doing that by emphasizing three things. He emphasizes:

- A. Humility
- B. Service
- C. Association

Listen to what he says:

“If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” (Mark 9:35 ESV)

Then he takes a little child and puts him in the centre of the circle and says:

“Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.” (Mark 9:37 ESV)

I like what R.T. France says here, he says:

“In this periscope there is no call ... to become like a child, but rather the injunction to ‘receive’ the child, to reverse

the conventional value-scale by according importance to the unimportant.”<sup>3</sup>

That’s it exactly! This passage isn’t calling on the disciples to become childish, it is calling on them to embrace people who are like children – vulnerable, seemingly unimportant, in need of help, unable to help you – people who are small, people who are at risk in this fallen and hostile world.

He is saying that you’ve got your value system upside down. You are thinking like the world. You are attracted to the people the world is attracted to. You are measuring success the way the world measures success. But we are going to do it the exact opposite way.

Jesus said stuff like this all the time.

“When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. 13 But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.” (Luke 14:12–14 ESV)

Do you see that? That’s the kingdom way. Let me translate that for you into a contemporary idiom. Jesus is saying: “When you plant a church, don’t go after the Baby Boomers or the rich, white Millennials – all the marketers are going after them because they have money and power and cultural cache – you go after the poor, the disabled, the broken families, the single moms and the drug addicts. Don’t plant your church in the suburbs – on the outskirts of town where all the parking is - that’s what Wal-Mart does, that’s what Home Depot does – you go DOWNTOWN, you go to the BAD NEIGHBOURHOOD – you set your sights a little LOWER – because that’s what kingdom people do.

They target the hurting, the vulnerable and the people who SEEMINGLY have nothing to contribute.

Is that a fair summary? Is that a reasonable contemporary translation?

So that’s the re-direct. As I said, its not a complicated passage – its just horribly convicting, that’s

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<sup>3</sup> R.T. France, *The Gospel Of Mark*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 374.

all. So, what should we do in response?

## What Should We Do In Response?

This is one of those passages that hits you like a car wreck. I don't think you just walk away from this and go to Swiss Chalet – this demands some self-reflection. Part of the reason this passage hits so hard is because it is so easy to see ourselves in it. Can anyone honestly tell me that evangelicalism has not missed the mark at least as badly as the disciples have in this story? Is the prosperity gospel any less preposterous than the version of Christianity being imagined by the disciples? Is the new soft Jesus of the sexual liberals any less detached from Scripture than the power and prestige Jesus of the disciples? We are equally and as egregiously astray in our understanding and expectations – that's why this passage hits so hard.

So let's slow down and think this through. Given what this passage is saying, what should we do in response?

I think the first thing is this, I think:

### **1. We need to audit our cultural assumptions**

I think Evangelicalism needs to be audited. Everything we believe needs to be picked up and analyzed in order to assess its origin and provenance. Why do so many people think that Jesus is indifferent to human sexuality? Where did that come from? Is that belief legitimately Christian? But how about this, why do so many Christians think that its ok to get divorced if you aren't getting along with one another? Or that its ok to cheat on your taxes, or its ok to watch Game of Thrones and soft core pornography? Or that hell probably isn't forever? Or that good people living in the jungle go to heaven even if they've never heard the Gospel? Or that good Christians never get sick? Or that all Christians ought to be rich?

How did we get to the point where so many of us believe so many things that are clearly at odds with the bible?

We need to do an audit because I think far too many of our theological assumptions come out of



the culture than the careful, prayerful study of God's Word.

Secondly, and obviously flowing out of that:

## **2. We need to commit to whole Bible reading**

We need to get out of the Daily Crouton approach to Bible reading. A verse here and a verse there allows us to hide from the parts of the bible we find unpleasant. It needs to stop. We need to read the Bible from cover to cover. If you can't do it in a year, do it in two years. If you can't do it in two years, do it in 4 years. Take 1 column from the RMM plan and work through that and you will make it through the whole Bible once every 4 years – and the New Testament and Psalms twice over those 4 years – I'll take that! That's a start. The Bible is intended to shape and norm our beliefs and values but it can only do that if we read it – and not just the parts we agree with. We need to pay particular attention to the parts we don't naturally agree with. That's where the magic really happens.

Then thirdly and this is where I want to land;

## **3. We need to “lower” the bar in 2018**

Here is what I mean by that. The disciples had their heads in the clouds – they were thinking about how cool it would be when Jesus booted out the Romans and set up the eternal kingdom. They were thinking about how awesome it would be to be part of the royal entourage and to be given places of power and prestige in the new administration – they were dreaming big, they were shooting for the stars, but Jesus brought them back down to earth. He said that he wanted them to serve and to be humble and to associate with the lowly. That's what I mean by lowering the bar.

This can be hard to wrap your head around so I want to help you think this through by asking a couple of probing personal questions. I've got one for you as an individual and one for us as a gathered tribe.

### **Questions (For 'You' And For 'Us')**

The first one is for you:

- i. Do you want to be on the Board or do you want to serve in the nursery?

Now I'm not saying that its wrong to be on the Board – every church needs good leaders – I'm just asking if that's your goal. Do you WANT to be on the Board – are you eager for a position of authority or are you focused on serving the lowly? That is the question.

Now let me offer an alternative wording, because some of you are smart enough to know what being on the Board actually entails so you don't want that. So let me ask it this way: Do you want to be on the worship team or do you want to wash dishes at the seniors' events?

Same basic idea.

Some of us – conditioned by the world – think that we ought to be seeking promotion and opportunity. People will come to me sometimes and demand that I provide a place for them to “use their gifts”. They are a gifted teacher or a gifted singer or a gifted leader and they are asking me to provide them a place to shine – but that's not what Jesus said. He said:

“If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” (Mark 9:35 ESV)

I'm not supposed to give you a place to shine I'm supposed to find you a place to serve and if we need small group leaders or worship team leaders or board level leaders maybe we'll give you a call but if what we need right now are potato peelers than I'm asking whether you have ambition for that? Because in the Kingdom of God its about serving not shining and promotions take care of themselves.

Jesus always told his followers to seek out the lowest SEAT and to let promotions look after themselves. He said take the lowest seat:

so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. 11 For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 14:10–11 ESV)

Jesus wasn't against promotions he was against SEEKING promotion. And he never said you

wouldn't shine, he just said you ought to focus on serving.

So let me ask you again, do you want to be on the Board or do you want to serve in the nursery?

Do you want to be on the worship team or do you want to peel potatoes?

Those questions will take you pretty close to the heart of what I'm after.

Now here's a question for us as a tribe:

- ii. Are we trying to be the biggest church in town or are we trying to reach the lost?

What's the goal here? We just came back from our yearly leadership retreat where we talk about goals and plans and strategies so we need to know what the goal is because that's where it all begins. You have to know what you are aiming at before you make plans about how to get there. So let me ask – is our goal to be the biggest church in town? Or the biggest church in the region or the biggest church in the province – is that the goal?

And how will we measure success? Will we be successful when there are 700 people attending here at the main campus and 300 at the RCC campus – is that success for us? 1000 people over two campuses? Or what about 1500 people over 3 campuses – is that success?

What is success? That's what I'm asking.

See, if success is filling this building then let's pull all that money out of missions – we've got nearly 17% our budget tied up in MISSIONS to people who will NEVER SIT IN ANY OF THESE SEATS – if success is about putting a bum in every one of these seats I know exactly what to do! Let's build a huge coffee bar in the lobby and put a fireplace in there and maybe a fountain. And then let's make a slide for the kids to go down that will deposit them in the CM area. Then let's invest huge amounts of money in marketing and welcome packages so that all of the Christian families who move to town come here to visit us first – before they try out any of our “competitors”. And let's be sure to target neighbourhoods where rich, employed, double income families are most likely to be found.

Then let's have give-aways and movie clips and 20 minute sermonettes about immediate concerns like how to make friends, how to succeed at work, how to manage jobs and families, how to balance a budget and how to teach kids about sex and social media. Let's do it! Let's do those things IF the goal is to have as many people in this building as possible.

But if the goal is to pursue souls – if the goal is to reach the lost - then that will require a totally different strategy. That will require seeking out the lowly – the people no one in the church growth movement is targeting. That will mean ministering to seniors, single moms, children, the poor, the addicted and the afflicted – that will mean going where they are and taking it to them because most of those people don't even own a car!

So what is it?

Do you want to be great at things that matter to the world?

Or great at things that matter to God?

That is the question.

I choose option B. I want to extend our reach into all the wrong places – humanly speaking. I want to love and serve people who can't do anything for us in return. If the rich come – if the Boomers come – if the Millennials come – I won't turn them away; I'll put them to work – but I'm setting my bar a little lower. I want to target the lost, the hurting, the broken and the bound.

Are you with me church?

Thanks be to God!

Let's pray together.