

# 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)*

## **Slow To Understand**

**November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017**

**Mark 8:1-33**

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning. I want to invite you to open your Bibles to Mark 8:1; that’s on page 843 in your pew Bibles. We are moving back into our Gospel of Mark series this morning – we took two months off to talk about some Family Matters – and we’re going to attempt to work our way back in by working our way through a fairly lengthy passage. It’s the perfect passage for us to be looking at today because it functions as both a summary of the first half and an anticipation of the second half. There are 16 chapters in Mark and this is the half way point – literally and thematically. The passage begins with a miracle that you will swear you have read before – because you have! The feeding of the 4000 seems very similar to the feeding of the 5000. And then there is a miracle about how sometimes people are very slow to see. And then there is the story of Peter getting a C+ on his midterm exam – and all of these stories are working together to make one simple point. The disciples of Jesus are very slow to understand. They are having a very hard time wrapping their heads around who Jesus is and what he has come to do. They have a very partial understanding at this point and it appears that they have actually missed the very heart and centre of the mission and mandate of Christ. And so this chapter is ideal for us this morning because it reminds us of where we’ve been and it puts the focus on where Mark intends to take us. From now on every story in Mark’s Gospel will be influenced and shaped by the power and gravity of the cross. Jesus turns a corner here – metaphorically speaking – and from this point on he is preparing his disciples for Golgotha. He is preparing them for the shame and

scandal of the cross.

We'll read the text and then we'll zoom out to the forest level and talk about what it is that the disciples of Jesus were so very slow to understand. Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 1.

1 In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat, he called his disciples to him and said to them, 2 "I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. 3 And if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way. And some of them have come from far away." 4 And his disciples answered him, "How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?" 5 And he asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven." 6 And he directed the crowd to sit down on the ground. And he took the seven loaves, and having given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and they set them before the crowd. 7 And they had a few small fish. And having blessed them, he said that these also should be set before them. 8 And they ate and were satisfied. And they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. 9 And there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away. 10 And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha. 11 The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him. 12 And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, "Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation." 13 And he left them, got into the boat again, and went to the other side. 14 Now they had forgotten to bring bread, and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. 15 And he cautioned them, saying, "Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." 16 And they began discussing with one another the fact that they had no bread. 17 And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? 18 Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember? 19 When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?" They said to him, "Twelve." 20 "And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?" And they said to him, "Seven." 21 And he said to them, "Do you not yet understand?" 22 And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. 23 And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, "Do you see anything?" 24 And he looked up and said, "I see people, but they look like trees, walking." 25 Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. 26 And he sent him to his home, saying, "Do not even enter the village." 27 And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" 28 And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets." 29 And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ." 30 And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him. 31 And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32 And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." (Mark 8:1-33 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

Well as I mentioned that is a fairly lengthy passage of Scripture but it is meant to be seen and read as a unit, and as a unit it intends to communicate a single point and the point is this: the disciples of Jesus are very slow to understand. Specifically, they are slow to understand:

**Slow To Understand:**

## 1. That the grace of God is for Jews and Gentiles alike

The disciples aren't quite as stupid as they might appear to a casual reader of the Bible – you see it isn't that the disciples FORGOT the feeding of the 5000 it is just that they never dreamed that such a miracle would be repeated in Gentile territory. When Jesus fed the 5000 he was feeding Jews – that was a miracle but it was not a surprise, the Messiah was supposed to feed the people of God – Moses had done that and all the prophecies said that the Messiah would do that. So that was a miracle – but this is a surprise. These people are not Jews – remember where we are. Look at your Bible for a second. Look at chapter 7:24:

And from there he arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon. (Mark 7:24 ESV)

Tyre and Sidon are in modern day Syria. This is not the Promised Land and these are not the covenant people. These are Gentiles. That's why the story in Mark 7:24-30 is probably labelled in your Bible "The Syrophoenician Woman's Faith" – as it is in mine. That miracle was about how, even though the Messiah was sent to the Jews FIRST – he had plenty of grace for Gentiles TOO. Do you remember that? The punch line of that story is that Jesus is so generous that he gives BREAD ENOUGH for the children and crumbs for the puppies too. He has grace enough for EVERYBODY! That was the point of the story and this story takes place at the same time and involves the same people – look at chapter 8 verse 1:

In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered (Mark 8:1 ESV)

We are still in the same place and we are dealing with the same people. That's why the disciples were unprepared for this miracle. They are shocked and gobsmacked that Jesus would do for a Gentile crowd exactly as he had done for Jews. That's what this story is about. The disciples are slow to understand that the grace of God is for Jews and Gentiles alike<sup>1</sup>.

The second thing they are slow to understand is:

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<sup>1</sup> "From the church fathers onward the church has rightly perceived that in the feeding of the four thousand Jesus brings saving bread to the Gentiles, as he brought it earlier to the Jews in the feeding of the five thousand." (James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 232.)

## 2. That Jesus is both Messiah and LORD

That is the ultimate point of both feeding miracles. We talked about this at length when we looked at the first feeding miracle in Mark 6. In Mark 6 when Jesus fed the 5000 we said that the point of that miracle was to reveal the identity of Jesus. The miracle was saying that:

- i. Jesus is the prophet like Moses
- ii. Jesus is the shepherd like David
- iii. Jesus is the Messianic King

But more than that – and this was the punch line of that sermon we heard back in July – and this is the punch line of the miracle of the feeding of the 5000 - Jesus is not just the prophet like Moses, or the Shepherd like David or even the Messianic King – he is all that and more. The punch line of that story was that:

- iv. Jesus is Almighty God

Jesus tried to help them see that. After the miracle John records that Jesus gave some teaching to help people understand. He said:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. (John 6:32 ESV)

Jesus explained that it was not really Moses who gave the bread in the desert – it was God! Therefore you are supposed to do more than identify me with Moses – you are supposed to identify me with God! And in case they didn’t get that – Jesus did another miracle right after the feeding of the 5000 that should also have made his identity very clear. Do you remember that?

After the miracle of the feeding of the 5000 Jesus pushed the disciples out onto the Sea of Galilee in a boat and he came out walking to them on the waves – do you remember that? Mark uses this weird term, he says that when Jesus came walking to them on the water:

He meant to pass by them (Mark 6:48 ESV)

What does it mean that he meant to pass them by? In the Bible that is the language of theophany – meaning that Jesus wasn't planning on walking by them as if to go somewhere else, he was passing by them in an obvious display of his Divinity. NT scholar James Edwards for example says:

As in the forgiveness of sins (2:10) and in his power over nature (4:39), walking on the lake identifies Jesus unmistakably with God.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus is God! That's the point of these feeding miracles – and that is what the disciples should have understood. That is why Jesus is so frustrated with them in Mark 8:14-21 when they begin to be anxious about not having any bread in advance of their coming journey. O my goodness! You are 13 people in a boat and you just saw Jesus feed 4000 people in the wilderness. And prior to that you saw Jesus feed 5000 people in the desert. How can you even begin to be anxious now about bread? Do you not understand that if Jesus is God and if he is in your boat **YOU ARE GOING TO BE FINE!**

How could you not get that? This is basic stuff! This is Sunday School stuff. Do you remember in Sunday School you learned that little song: "The Lord shall supply all my needs, according to his riches in glory, he gives his angels charge over me, Jehovah Jireh cares for me, for me, for me, Jehovah Jireh cares for me." Right? This is Christianity 101 – Jesus is Jehovah Jireh and he cares for me – therefore why are you anxious about food or clothing? Now you say pastor, settle down. Remember that the disciples didn't go to Sunday School – they certainly go to your Sunday School so they didn't learn any handy dandy songs from the 80's. They didn't have that advantage, such as it is. Well be that as it may – they did hear the Sermon on the Mount – live and in person - and they ought to have remembered Jesus saying:

do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? (Matthew 6:25–26 ESV)

Jesus said: God cares for you and the miracle of the feedings said I AM GOD. So let's put this together friends: if God cares for you and I am God and I am in your BOAT then what in the

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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), 198.

world are you worried about? Obviously you're going to be fine. Chill out. Jehovah Jireh cares for you. We teach that to children, Jesus taught it to them, but the disciples were slow to understand.

They were also slow to understand that:

### **3. That the Messiah has to suffer**

Peter gets a C+ on his midterm exam. Jesus asks the disciples:

who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ." (Mark 8:29 ESV)

And that wasn't bad. It wasn't wrong and it was the first time that answered had passed over human lips. Up until this point in Mark's Gospel only the demons had correctly identified Jesus as the Messiah – so props to Peter. He was halfway there, but he still couldn't see all the way. So Jesus began to teach them plainly. He said:

that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. (Mark 8:31 ESV)

And Peter, instead of receiving this information and treasuring it up in his heart, or asking a clarifying question, reacts with outrage. He actually takes it upon himself to rebuke Jesus for his suggestion that the Messiah must suffer. Mark says:

Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." (Mark 8:32–33 ESV)

In refusing to accept this part of Messiah's call and duty Peter unwittingly becomes an agent of the devil. The devil would love a Christ without a cross – that is just the sort of Jesus that would completely inoculate people against the truth of the Gospel and Peter unwittingly gives a voice to that destructive lie.

Now, in fairness to Peter we should remember here that no one in Judaism had been expecting a

suffering Messiah<sup>3</sup>. People were just not thinking in that direction. Everyone in Israel was expecting a military Messiah. A Messiah who would fight the enemies of God's people – like David had done. And they weren't wrong, they just didn't understand what their real enemy was. They didn't understand that it wasn't the Roman government that was holding them back – it was THEIR OWN SIN. They didn't understand that – and so they didn't understand Jesus. They were slow to understand all that he was and all that he had come to do.

And that leads us to our final observation. The disciples were slow to understand:

#### **4. That faith is a gift from God**

As you read these stories you can't help but thinking: "If they don't get it now then they are never going to get it." Right? I mean they just saw Jesus do the most amazing miracle in the New Testament thus far – TWICE! Twice Jesus feeds a multitude out of scraps and nothing. TWICE! But they still don't get it! They are still in the boat wondering what they will eat for lunch. Seriously??!! He just fed the 5000 and then the 4000 and you are worried about lunch? What is the matter with you?

What is the matter with them is that they live among an unbelieving people. That's what Jesus says to them in the boat. Look at verse 15, he says:

"Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." (Mark 8:15 ESV)

Leaven – or yeast – is a common metaphor for a spreading corruption. Yeast spreads and changes things – and Jesus is saying here that the disciples are being affected by the attitude and assumptions of their cultural context. Jesus is just stating the obvious here. He is saying that UNBELIEF IS CONTAGIOUS. The Bible says this all the time. In Ezekiel 12:2 God says to the prophet:

"Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, who have eyes to see, but see not, who have ears to hear, but hear not, for they are a rebellious house. (Ezekiel 12:2 ESV)

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<sup>3</sup> James Edwards for example says, "Never in Israel was it heard that the Messiah should suffer." (James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 253)

Just beware son of man, that you live with unbelieving people – be very careful that you are not influenced by them!

Unbelief is contagious and the disciples live among a hard hearted and unbelieving people. What hope therefore is there that they will see and understand what God is doing through the person and work of Jesus Christ? And the answer is: no hope. No hope at all – apart from a miracle of God.

And that is the point that Mark is trying to make by inserting the story of the two stage healing of the blind man.

This is a very unusual healing. Normally Jesus heals with a word. Never are his healings imperfect or incomplete in any way. Why then does it take two touches from Jesus for this man to see clearly? Because this man is a symbol of everyman. I am by no means the first person to see this. R.T. France for example says:

“Mark included this story at this point in his narrative because for him it illustrated a fundamental theme of the journey to Jerusalem, the curing of the disciples’ blindness. But the symbolic does not exclude the literal.”<sup>4</sup>

This really happened – literally – but the reason Mark includes it here is because of the symbolic value. The healing of this man symbolizes our need for on-going help from Jesus to understand and properly worship Jesus!

Are you seeing that? Faith is a gift! Peter needed help to get halfway there and he will need more help to make it all the way home. And so will you; so will I! The cry of every true believer is:

“I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24 ESV)

### **Application:**

That’s what this story is about! It’s a story of everyman – it’s a story about you and it’s a story about me – we are slow to understand – we need help from God to see and to worship Jesus as

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<sup>4</sup> R.T. France, *The Gospel Of Mark*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 323.



we should. So what should we do? How do we leave here having heard that? In the time we have left let me just give you 3 very practical applications.

## 1. Be humble

This is a story, basically about how hard it is, because of sin and because of our cultural context, for human beings to see or believe what they should. Sin bends us away from truth and unbelief is contagious – therefore be careful and cautious about trusting in what you think you know about anything. Human beings are terrible about this and we don't seem to be learning from our mistakes. Every time you read the news you see a headline like this:

**Astronomers have discovered a planet the size of Jupiter orbiting a star that's only half the size of the sun — a celestial phenomenon that contradicts theories of planet formation!**<sup>5</sup>

Oh no! Everything we thought we knew about planet formation is wrong. Oh dear. Or how about this:

**New fossil discovery changes human origin story**<sup>6</sup>

Nuts! It turns out that we were wrong about human origins as well. Well, here's the thing then, maybe if everything we find contradicts everything we say, then, maybe we should say less or at least say it less ARROGANTLY. Right? Maybe we don't really see what is there, maybe we see what we want to see and maybe we just believe what everyone else around us believes. So maybe we should be humble. Maybe we should trust ourselves less and God more.

The second application I think here is this:

## 2. Be contrite

Let's just be aware that our sin is the greatest barrier to our understanding. As a pastor I see this

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.foxnews.com/science/2017/10/31/monster-planet-discovery-stuns-scientists.html>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/the-current-for-june-9-2017-1.4152150/new-fossil-discovery-changes-human-origin-story-1.4152204>

all the time. A person will come in through these doors and they will say: “Pastor I don’t understand your sermons. They are way over my head. You have to dumb it down for me.” And I usually just wait and then more often than not, as the Lord works on them and as they do business with Jesus and he changes their heart and gives them the Holy Spirit – all of the sudden, a few weeks or months or even years later they will come to me and say: “Pastor! I so appreciate your sermons! It is like you are speaking directly into my soul! I understand and the Holy Spirit is making the Word alive to me! I just want to tell you pastor that you have become a much better preacher.”

And I smile and say thank you but of course that isn’t what happened at all. I didn’t get any better and I didn’t dumb it down, Jesus just did a miracle in your life. He took away your sin and he gave you the Holy Spirit and now you see everything perfectly fine.

There are a lot of you who could tell that story but there are some who can’t yet, and that leads me to our final take-away, and it is this:

### **3. Be eager for a further touch from Jesus**

Listen I think that there are people in this room sitting here between their two touches. Right? God did an initial work in your life many years ago – maybe you went to a Billy Graham Crusade in the 70’s and God touched your eyes and helped you to see and maybe you went forward and that was great – that got you started. But maybe you’ve been sitting in that blessing now for 40 years, 50 years, seeing the world like stick figures. Seeing some things but missing most things. Maybe the simple truths of the Bible are still going over your head. Can I tell you something? It isn’t me and it isn’t you. It isn’t that you aren’t smart enough. Some of you who are telling me that you don’t understand can read a technical manual for a lawn mower and immediately understand how that works – I can’t do that. Its not an intelligence thing. You are plenty smart enough. The issue is that you haven’t gone back to Jesus for a further touch of grace. You’ve been sitting between your miracles and its time to stop. Its time to say to Jesus:

I believe Lord! Help my unbelief!

Its time to open your mouth and ask him to fill it.

Its time to go to him for a further filling of the Holy Spirit – because you leak. I leak. We all leak. We all lean towards wilful ignorance and misunderstanding. So pray. Ask him to help you again. Be like the blind man! Get yourself before Jesus and ask him to touch you again. Let's do that right now - let's pray together.