

Mark Part 8

Mark 8:22-33

Jesus accepts you where you are, but can change you into what you can be.

The first story.

- *Mark 8:22-26; Isaiah 61:1-2, 35:5*

- Sets the stage
- Is a parallel

The second story.

- *Mark 8:27-30*

- The place
- The question

Jesus asks me this question.

- The answer

The third story.

- *Mark 8:31-33*

Today, with my life, my answer is...



West Valley Church
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The Gospel of Mark

Chapter 8¹

Today we're in chapter 8 of our summer series in the Gospel of Mark. Hopefully you've been following along in the reading plan we made for you, and you've already read chapter 8. If you don't have one you can still pick one up at the Welcome Center.

If you've been with us from the beginning of this series, you might remember something I said early on, which is that there's something really important to remember about how Mark's gospel is organized. There are 16 chapters in Mark. But Mark divided the book into two halves. In the first eight chapters we see Jesus demonstrating and trying to show the disciples that he is the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God. He's trying to show the disciples *who he is*. And for eight chapters the disciples just don't get it; they cannot figure it out. Then finally at the end of chapter eight (in the very middle of the book) we see it shift – Jesus asks them, “Who do you think I am,” and Peter says, “You are the Christ,” or “You are the Messiah.” They finally get it!

Then, for the next eight chapters we see Jesus trying to show them *who he is not*, because they think the Messiah would be a conquering geopolitical king giving the Jews all the power and control over everyone else in the world. But that's not who Jesus is; he is not an earthly king like we think of; he is a serving, suffering, saving king. He came to serve, to suffer, and to give his life for us.

So today we are in chapter eight – this is the hinge event in Mark's Gospel.

I want to quickly give you a summary of the beginning of chapter eight because our main focus is going to be the second half of the chapter.

In the Bible there were really only two categories of people: Jews and non-Jews, or Gentiles. There were the Jews and then everyone else was Gentiles. So here's why you need to know that: in verses 1-9 there is a miracle when Jesus feeds 4,000 people from only seven loaves and a few fish. Remember, in chapter 6 he miraculously fed a crowd of 5,000 men with five loaves and two fish. There were 12 basketfuls leftover in the first one and seven basketfuls leftover after this one.

These two miraculous feedings tell us something really cool; they tell us who Jesus came to serve and save. The crowd that was fed in the first miracle feeding was Jewish people. And there were *twelve* basketfuls of food leftover. This is God's way of saying with an exclamation point that in Jesus, his plan for the twelve tribes of Israel has been fulfilled.

The crowd in this second miracle feeding is Gentiles – non-Jews. With this group there are *seven* basketfuls of leftovers. Seven is the Bible number for completeness, spiritual

¹ Kent Brower, *Mark: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, New Beacon Bible Commentary (Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2012)
David Smith, *Mark: A Commentary for Bible Students* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2007)
John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016)
Michael O'Neill, *Between a Rock and a Hard Head*, Sermon, West Valley Church, 04/07/2024

perfection and fulness. So with this feeding, God is saying with an exclamation point that Jesus is everything the Gentiles need to become complete in life; he will provide everything they need.

So with these two stories, we see Jesus Christ came for *everybody* and is everything *everyone* needs to be filled and made complete – with abundant leftovers!

The other thing this story shows us is that the disciples *still* can't figure out who Jesus is; they are completely and utterly spiritually blind. That's important to realize for where we're headed in this chapter.

Then we see Jesus' interactions with the Pharisees and the disciples in verses 14-21. Their interactions with Jesus have continued to get worse. They started out with engaging in discussions, then we see them disagreeing with Jesus, then trying to trick him into saying something they can use against him, and then to conspiring to murder Jesus. They have rejected Jesus entirely, so we see Jesus warning the disciples about the blindness of the Pharisees. Jesus says the Pharisees' attitudes and their blind commitment to their traditions are like yeast in dough; it just keeps growing. If Jesus was saying this today, he might say that their religious traditionalism is like cancer cells; it just keeps growing until it kills the body. Remember what we talked about last week? Traditionalism can be cancerous.

So that gets us to the part we're going to really look at today. Would you help me honor God's Word by standing with me as I read it to us? You can see it on the screens if you'd like. This is from Mark chapter 8:

They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. 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?"

He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around."

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. Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't even go into the village."

Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?" (*Here comes the hinge!*)

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Peter answered, "You are the Messiah." (*There's the hinge – Peter realizes it!*)

Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him. 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. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

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.” (Mark 8:22-33, niv. *Italics added*)

May God bless the hearing of his Word to our hearts. You can be seated; thanks for standing.

Did you see what Peter said? In this story we can see what Simon was and what Simon could become – Peter. The same was true with the disciples. Eventually God was able to accomplish great things through them; just as God can through you.

There may be a number of things that God wants to teach you today, but one thing for sure is this:

Jesus accepts you where you are, but can change you into what you can be if you let him. (repeat)

Write that down if you need to: Jesus accepts me where I am but can change me into what I can be.

For that to happen in your life, it will depend on your response today. Prepare yourself to respond to what Jesus asks you!

We'll start by looking at the context of this passage within the rest of the chapter. It really involves three stories, which can be broken up into verses 22-26, then verses 27-30, and then verses 31-33. So let's dissect...

The first story. (8:22-26)

First, a blind man is brought to Jesus for healing, and Jesus takes him outside the village to heal him. Doesn't that seem strange? Most of the time, Jesus just healed people right on the spot; so why does he take this man away from the crowds? Well for one, it shows Jesus' genuine tenderness and respect toward the man's feelings; Jesus doesn't want a crowd gathering around the man for some kind of entertainment. Then we're told that Jesus spits in the man's eyes. Why does he do that? Because at that time it was a common ancient belief that spit had healing capabilities. Did Jesus need to heal him this way? Of course not; we've seen him just say a word and someone is healed. But Jesus used what they commonly understood as medicine to help this man's faith in his healing. Jesus did this because he met the man at his level of understanding.

West Valley Church had a partnership with a church in Guyana, South America, for about five years. We took 12 trips with people to help build their church and community center. Four times we brought folks from their church up here. At that time it was a poor country with very inadequate medical resources. One of the things I noticed is that they have a lot of miracle healings. I asked their pastor why we saw so many more miracle healings there than we see here in the States. He said, “We don't have that in Guyana, so God just simply does it. You have medical resources and God uses that to heal people in your country.” That's kind of what happened here; Jesus used what medical resources the man understood

in order to heal him.

So then Jesus heals him, but it's in stages. Why is that? One reason is that Jesus was helping this guy – because to go from being totally blind and in the dark to suddenly seeing in the bright desert sun would blind the man again! But this healing also has a deeper significance and meaning.

First, this healing...

- Sets the stage.

Jesus is about to establish with his disciples the fact that he is the Messiah. Up until now, he's let them try to figure it out themselves, and they've been blind to who Jesus really is. By performing this miracle, Jesus is putting an exclamation point on the fact that he's the Messiah.

You see, it was well known among the Jews that the Messiah would restore sight to the blind. For example, the Old Testament prophet Isaiah gave a lot of "messianic prophecies" about the Christ and what he would do. Listen to this prophecy made 700 years before Christ from Isaiah 61:

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor
and the day of vengeance of our God,
to comfort all who mourn... (Isaiah 61:1-2, niv)

In fact, in Luke 4:18-21 Jesus read this passage in the synagogue and then said:

"Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your midst." (Luke 4:21)

In another passage in Isaiah about the Christ it says:

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped.
(Isaiah 35:5, niv)

So a well-known prerequisite of the Messiah is healing the blind, and healing the blind man here in chapter 8 sets the stage for Jesus' confirmation that he is the Christ, the long-promised Messiah.

The second reason that this first story is important is because it...

- Is a parallel with the *next* story, which is the conversation with the disciples.

The first story of healing the blind man is intended to be *juxtaposed*, or laid alongside, or paralleled with the second story of the disciples' spiritual blindness in order to make a

point. Here's the point: In the first story we see a man go from totally blind to partially seeing and then looking into the face of Jesus, seeing clearly.

In the second story we see the disciples who have been spiritually blind to who Jesus is, then they are beginning to understand (in fact, earlier in this chapter Jesus gave the disciples a spiritual eye exam and said, "Do you have eyes but fail to see?" [Mark 8:18]). Then, in this story, we see the disciples' spiritual healing as they finally see clearly who Jesus is. It's in stages, just like the blind guy's healing.

So that brings us to...

The second story in the passage, **(8:27-30)**.

This short passage has been called the key that unlocks the entire Gospel. This is the center and is the hinge of Mark's gospel. It is the "great aha!", it's when the spiritual light bulb finally turns on. The disciples finally figure it out.

Up until this point in Mark's gospel, Jesus' ministry was to the multitudes, with the disciples watching and sometimes helping, but for the second half of Mark, Jesus' ministry is almost entirely directed at and to the disciples.

This can't come soon enough. The shadow of the cross has fallen on Jesus' path; crucifixion is only six months away from this event. So it is imperative for the disciples to really know who Jesus is. It is important that they get it straight because Jesus knows that their concept of the Messiah is messed up. We've seen this a few times in these chapters. I mentioned this earlier, but the disciples believed the Messiah would be the supernatural conqueror who would literally torture and destroy everyone *except* the Jews, until only the Jews were left to enjoy being in charge and watching all their enemies being broken and in hell. They thought the Messiah would be a geopolitical king over the whole world with the Jews on top. They thought the Messiah would be the most destructive conqueror in history – violent, nationalistic, and vengeful. Those expectations were not accurate. The Jews took the Old Testament prophecies and mixed them with their own anger and angst against being oppressed and turned the Scriptural Messiah into their own political tyrant. But Jesus was *nothing* like their wrong expectations, and time was running out for Jesus, so he had to accelerate his efforts to set the disciples straight on who he was.

Now there are three things that I want us to see in this second story encounter, and the first thing is...

- The place.

Jesus has this conversation with his disciples in a place called Caesarea Philippi. That is not coincidental nor accidental. Jesus *chose* this place to reveal for the first time who he was. Why? What's so significant about it? It's huge because this was the place where the world's gods were born and made.

First, it was the birthplace of Baal worship – Baal is the infamous idol of the Old Testament stories. Because of this, the city was called Balinas for a while.

Second, Greek mythology said it was the birthplace of Pan, the god of nature. So it was also called Panias for a while. To this very day, it's called Banias – a combination of the two names.

Third, at the time Jesus and the disciples were there, there was a magnificent marble temple that stood in the city as a worship center to the emperor Caesar Augustus, who declared himself to be a god. Emperor worship had been established as a way to get peoples' obedience to Caesar.

Fourth, even for the Jews this place was packed with sacred memories of God's miracles, since the water spring there is the origin of the Jordan River and that's the river where God had done so many miracles for the Jews during the Exodus stories.

So you can see why Jesus chose this place: Jesus deliberately and publicly acknowledged being the Christ right smack in the very presence of the world's gods. Baal: worship of idols and false gods. Pan: worship of nature and science. Caesar: worship of man and politics. Judaism: worship of tradition. This all represents the entirety of everything we worship *except* having the true faith in Christ. By the way, you can bet that when Jesus comes into your life he will establish himself as Lord over every other thing you worship!

But there is something else here too – even though this place represented all mankind's misplaced worship, Jesus met them there! Remember: Jesus will meet you where you are and accept you where you are. Jesus will come right to where you are in all your confusion, pain, your misunderstandings of God, and he accepts you right there. Isn't that great news?! You don't have to figure it all out first. *But* – he won't leave you where you are; he will help you leave your false gods and spiritual misunderstandings behind and can change you into who you can be if you'll let him. So all that is packed into what we learn from the place.

Next let's look at...

- The question.

Jesus begins with a great method of teaching – by asking questions. And it's a big one: "Who do *people* say that I am?" You might think it's a simple question needing a profound answer. If Jesus walked into a theological school today and asked the question, "Who do people say that I am?" They could've said, "You are the eschatological manifestation of the kerygma in which we recognize the soteriological Logos of the Godhead having special pertinence toward interpersonal relationships with God and self and the other, resulting in the divine ecclesiological demonstration to the world." And Jesus would say, "What?" (That's all legit, by the way!) Seriously though, *Jesus' question is not a simple question needing a profound answer; it's a profound question needing a simple answer.* Let me explain:

Why do you think Jesus asked that question; why did Jesus want to know what people thought of him? After all, Jesus knew who he was; it wasn't like he was insecure or experiencing an identity crisis. Jesus asked because he was wanting *the disciples* to realize who he is. So, Jesus started the line of questioning by asking what popular opinion was, and the disciples answered by saying some say a prophet, a great teacher, even a miracle worker. But then Jesus got to the point – he went straight to the heart of the issue by

asking, “Forget about everyone else. What about *you*? Who do *you* say that I am?” By the way, Jesus will do this with us. He will get right to the heart of things with you.

Write this down:

Jesus asks me this question.

He’s asking you today: who do you say he is? Whatever you did or didn’t say about him in the past, what do you say *today*; who do you say Jesus is? Because third we need to see...

- The answer.

Simon is one of those guys who always spoke for everyone else. So Simon speaks up as usual, but this time, instead of putting his foot in his mouth, he makes the courageous and amazing statement: *You are the Christ!*

Matthew records this story in Matthew 16:13-20, and he says that Jesus pointed out to Simon that God helped him realize it. And because of that confession, Jesus renames Simon to Peter. Peter or “Petra” is a name that means “rock.” Jesus wasn’t proclaiming Peter to be a fake wrestler turned movie star, nor was he saying Peter was the first pope of the catholic church; Jesus was making the point that realizing who Jesus is, is the rock of faith: *this confession is the bedrock foundation of faith*. From now on, anyone who calls him “Peter” will know that he’s professed Jesus as the Christ. Is your profession of faith that clear when people see you?

So then comes...

The third story. (8:31-33)

Once the disciples finally understand who Jesus is, Jesus says, “Finally! Yes! You’ve figured it out! It’s true! And now that you know this about me, I need to explain to you what God’s gameplan has been all along – I will be arrested, tortured, and crucified. This is necessary so that I can be the ultimate sacrificial Passover lamb for the sins of the whole world. But then I will rise from the dead.”

Peter had his moment of clarity, but this was beyond comprehension for newly named Peter. He says he will have none of that – he swears he will not allow Jesus to be arrested or tortured and for sure not crucified. So Peter takes it upon himself to set Jesus straight and interrupts Jesus and stops all that nonsense talk.

The ink hasn’t even dried on Peter’s name change certificate when he starts spouting off so contrary to Jesus’ teaching, that Jesus has to rebuke him. In fact, Jesus calls Peter “Satan” – the name for our enemy, the devil. The name means adversary or accuser. Jesus is saying, “You confessed I’m the Christ and I call you Peter, but now you’re talking like my adversary; like the devil!” Right after Peter makes his foundational, God inspired confession of faith, he starts talking like Satan, because, Jesus says, he doesn’t have the things of God in mind but the things of humans. Peter is not thinking with God’s wisdom but with limited, human

thinking. On our *best* days, our plans are always way below God's plans.

For all that, don't miss this: Jesus *still* accepted Peter where he was, because He knew who Peter could become, because, for all Peter's faults, he was still willing to let Jesus change him.

When Peter said, "You are the Christ" it was with his mind – he realized that Christ was the source and meaning of life, but also more than his mind, it was with his spirit – that this person named Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, and Peter was determined to follow and obey Jesus, and be changed by him. You can say it with your mind, but it's not faith until you follow.

Peter answered the question, and even though he obviously had more growing to do, he was on the road to who he would become – a person who would make a difference in the world for Christ. *And you will be too, depending on your answer.* Christ is asking you today: "Who do you say that I am, and will you let me change you?" He's asking you the question. Christ awaits your answer. He is looking to you and lovingly awaiting your response. You cannot leave here today until you've answered him. If you don't answer, then you've given him your answer. So what is your answer? Maybe you want to write this down...

Today, with my life, my answer is....

What will you say? Not just mentally saying so; it's not faith until you follow.

Jesus has proven his credentials with everything he's done in the first half of Mark's gospel leading up to the healing of the blind man. That miracle was also an analogy for the disciples' spiritual progress up to that point. So right there, in the epicenter of the world's spiritual confusion, Jesus questioned and confronted his disciples and declared himself to be Christ. Today, you live in a country that is an epicenter of spiritual chaos and confusion. Jesus stands here and asks you the question: "Who do you say that I am?"

Listen, your answer does not determine who Jesus is; he is Christ and Lord regardless of whether you say so or not. Peter's confession didn't change Jesus – it changed Peter. Your answer doesn't determine who Jesus is; your answer determines *who you are and who you will become*. Jesus' identity is not at stake; yours is. Name him Christ in honest faith and follow him, and he will save you and begin the change in you toward the absolute best you could ever be.

Prayer

Benediction:

(May) Christ ... dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:17-19, niv)