



Home Group Leaders' Notes
Week of February 22, 2026
Mark 7:1-8:26

"THE CHOSEN"

Watching this TV series has put in picture what we sometimes imagine as we read the Bible. Repeatedly, the author of "Mark" has stories of "amazing" things that Jesus did and taught. This week is no exception. But there is an added scene: confrontation. Have you ever been confronted by another disciple of Jesus? How might confrontation be something that we sometimes need in community?

TIPS FOR UNDERSTANDING

The following are a few comments that might help with understanding the passage.

7:2, 9 "Defiled." The Pharisees accused the disciples of failing to follow their man-made ritual and thus being ritually "defiled," which meant that they were unworthy of being before God. In verse nine, Jesus pointed out that they had rejected the commandment of God and established their own traditions. Jesus then gave an example in verse ten.

7:24 Most of the people who lived in Tyre and Sidon were gentiles (not Jews).

7:27: "Dogs?" To call someone a dog was an insult. It was a common slur that the Jews used of gentiles, calling them "dogs.". To Jews, dogs were wild scavengers and not pets. However, the Gentiles did have them as pets. Jesus used a softer form of "dog," the kind that they would have inside their house. Here, Jesus used this illustration to point out that the Messiah was to come first to the Jews and she got it. She recognized that He was the Messiah (who else could do what she had heard that He could do. So, she knew that He was speaking as the one sent to the Jews first and also understood that this could mean salvation for the gentiles. She recognized that "dogs" didn't need to wait until the children finished because the crumbs spilled over to them. Jesus recognized her faith and healed her daughter.

7:31 Decapolis was a group of 10 cities populated mostly with gentiles.

8:14-21: "Hardened hearts." A hard heart was the characteristic of Jesus' opposition and Pharaoh in Exodus. It points to lack of belief in one's heart. In this case, Jesus is fully God and the disciples, though seeing God at work, had not yet fully given themselves to belief.

8:15 The "leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod" was spiritual blindness and hardness of heart. They did not see or acknowledge Jesus' identity, the kingdom of God, not place faith in Him.

Just a reminder that the questions and answers may seem somewhat obvious to seasoned students of the Bible. We are aiming to include those who are newcomers in our groups.

READ THROUGH MARK 7:1 – 8:26 AND CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

Our passage begins with a rebuke of the Pharisees. What is Jesus' main point?

They are following their own 'set of rules' and are far from God. Though Jesus has served and taught in their presence, they don't even recognize the very Messiah that they teach is coming.

According to 7:15-23, what is the real cause of defilement (i.e. making us unfit to be in God's presence)? From what we know, what is the 'cure' for defilement?

The Pharisees and other teachers insisted that food with their manmade ceremonies was causing defilement. Jesus taught that our attitudes and actions are what causes defilement (separation from God). Jesus' list included heart, thoughts, and actions. He then listed 12 actions or attitudes that flow from a corrupt heart.

The story of an unnamed gentile woman has a surprising twist. What does she understand and do that is unlike the religious leaders? How is she an illustration of the 'cure' for defilement? (7:24-30)

She recognizes that Jesus is the Messiah to the Jews, but that his blessing is meant to spill over to the Gentiles. Faith/trust in Jesus, the Messiah and Son of God, is the cure for defilement.

How is the healing of a gentile deaf person appropriate in this setting? (7:31-37)

Both the Pharisees and to a lesser degree the disciples are 'deaf' to what Jesus is teaching.

Jesus' third miracle in Gentile regions was the feeding of 4,000 (8:1-9). How is the response of the gentiles (8:8) a direct contrast with the religious Pharisees (8:11-12)?

Throughout Jesus ministry to the Gentiles, they seem to be welcoming and wanting of His ministry. The Pharisees have been opposing Him from the beginning.

The story in 8:13-20 is central to this entire passage. Jesus' primary work was with the twelve. But here, He broke out with a series of questions, beginning with "no bread," that revealed that the disciples were acting more like a Pharisee than like the gentile woman (7:29). What was their danger?

Bread has been central to several stories in this section. First, the Pharisees suggested that bread with their religious practice would defile. Then came Jesus' illustration to the Gentile woman about bread. And then, Jesus providing bread for 4,000. So that the disciples were concerned because they forgot to bring bread was an illustration that they weren't trusting in the one who can provide bread for 4,000, who is the Messiah, the Son of God. They still weren't 'seeing' and trusting in the truth of who Jesus is. This would leave them vulnerable to fall away, to become like Herod and the Pharisees who had doubts and disbelief.

What are the similarities of Jesus' healing miracles in 7:31-37 and 8:22-26?

Both miracles involved touching the parts of the body that were failing (ears, eyes), both involved Jesus sharing His spit, the two-stage healing, and

This illustrates that understanding who He is will be gradual – that people, even disciples, will not fully understand until later (perhaps after His resurrection). It is, as Jesus said in 8:21, "Do you still not understand?"

How do these healing miracles reflect the issues (defects) of the religious leaders (cf. 7:6-9; 8:11-13) and sometimes even the twelve (8:18)?

We can know enough and yet be slow to understand who Jesus is and our need to fully trust in Him as Messiah, Son of God, and our Savior.

What does the healing of the blind man illustrate?

Similar to above question. We can be slow to understand and surrender our lives to Jesus. But that as we trust in Him, we will see more clearly.

DISCUSS HOW WE MIGHT APPLY WHAT WE LEARN

In this passage, we see that Jesus is compassionate (8:2) and yet urgent to confront people with the danger they face (7:18; 8:17). What dangers does He warn about? How do we see these dangers in our world? How are we, as disciples, to continue Jesus' work?

Discussion question

In what ways are we sometimes following the examples of the Pharisees and religious leaders? What false ideas do we sometimes follow thinking that it will make us acceptable to God? Instead, what actions and attitudes does God desire for us?

Discussion question

What is the evidence that we have truly 'seen' and 'heard' Jesus? We began the book of "Mark" with a call to follow Jesus as a 'disciple.' What have we learned that this means?

Discussion question

In this passage, we see Jesus provide truth (instruction), spiritual cleansing, food, and healing. How are we, as disciples, called to continue Jesus' work?

Discussion question

APPLY IT THIS WEEK

Living as a disciple of Jesus means seeing and acknowledging who He is (Son of God, Messiah, Savior, Lord) and following Him. As you walk through your week, how does believing the truth of who He is impact your ways, your decisions, and your priorities?