

For several summers when I was in college, I worked at Del Monte during the packing of various vegetables. Over the years, I got to see the whole process.

- I'd unload empty cans from the can manufacturer.
- I watched the carrots, peas, corn, or beans being dumped from the trucks.
- There were sorting tables where people pulled out debris before the product was washed.
- The cook room was the busiest place: the washed product was moved by conveyer belts into huge hoppers over the canning machines. Inspectors were busy grading the product. The corn would drop into the cans, the machine would place a lid was placed on the can, spin the can around, and then move the can onto a rack for cooking. A forklift would place a pallet of cans into the large cookers.
- When the cans were fully cooked another forklift would move the pallets to a place to cool down before going to the labeling room.
- In the labeling room the cans would go through a machine to affix a label on them, according to the grade of the product.
- I would move the newly labeled product to either the warehouse or onto a train for shipping.

My point is: there is a process to manufacturing. But there us also a process of building relationships.

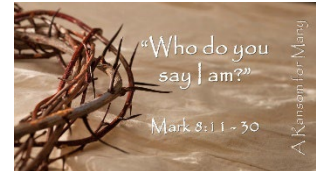
- For example, when we meet our future spouses, there is something that attracts us, sometimes a little unsettledness.
- Then, we get to know our future spouses by spending time with them.
- We learn to trust them as we slowly give ourselves incrementally.
- We learn their likes and dislikes.
- Eventually, we get to a point where we know them well enough to propose or say yes to a proposal.
- Then we walk through life learning even more about them.

We are simply going segment by segment through the book of Mark. Mark's key verse is: 'For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mk 10:45 NIV).'

- In the first half, Jesus serves people through miracles, healings, and even feeding them.
- In the second half, Jesus is the suffering savior, who gives his life as a ransom.

Today, in the book of Mark, we look at the process of the disciples learning who Jesus is. Today is the turning point of the book:

- The disciples identify Jesus as the Messiah.
- But immediately Jesus begins to clarify their misconceptions of who the Messiah is.
- Jesus prompts this discussion when he asks, 'who do you say I am?'



### 'Who do you say I am?'

Mark 8:11-30

Mark's gospel opens with 'This is the Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God (Mk 1:1 NLT).' Nevertheless, throughout these first eight chapters, we are supposed to ask ourselves, 'who is Jesus?' There are three viewpoints:

Three viewpoints in chapters 1-8:

1. The disciples. They seem very human. Mark does not gloss over their imperfections. We see that the disciples ...
  - Lack faith.
  - They don't understand.
  - They are hard hearted.
  - They are not able to do tasks assigned to them. They are just like us (smile).
2. The Pharisees and other religious leaders. They already believe Jesus is empowered by demonic forces. At the very least, he is a threat to their political power and influence over the people.
3. The common people. The average person thought Jesus was John the Baptist, Elijah, or some other miracle worker.

Let's jump right in.

#### 1. Prove It, 8:11-13.

'When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had arrived, they came and started to argue with him. Testing him, they demanded that he show them a miraculous sign from heaven to prove his authority. <sup>12</sup>When he heard this, he sighed

deeply in his spirit and said, “Why do these people keep demanding a miraculous sign? I tell you the truth, I will not give this generation any such sign.”<sup>13</sup> So he got back into the boat and left them, and he crossed to the other side of the lake (Mk 8:11-13 NLT).”

The Pharisees’ demand for a sign is not to prove his divinity. They want to know where he gets his power. But they already believe his power comes from Beelzebub, a demonic prince (3:22-30).

The Pharisees ...

- Are following Dt 13:2-6, where signs were to be tested ‘to find out whether you love him with all your heart (Dt 13:3 NIV).’ This was the test for a prophet.
- Signs guaranteed the truthfulness of a statement or action.<sup>1</sup> Let’s say I make a prophecy, so that you would know I spoke the truth, I turn water into wine. Then, my word is confirmed to be authentic.
- They don’t need to see more miracles; they want proof that he is from God.
- They assume demonic power and they need to be convinced otherwise.

Jesus ...

- Is aware of their hostility.
- His deep sigh was frustration and grief over their unbelief.
- If Jesus had performed a sign, they would use Dt 13:2-6 against him. They would have said he does not love the Lord with all his heart, because he did not follow their traditions. He was an outsider and therefore this could only be demonic power. They held the judicial and structural power of Judaism.

We should be careful seeking signs and wonders. In a sense, the Pharisees were correct.

Jesus said, ‘A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a sign (Mt 12:39, 16:4).’

- We like signs and wonders.
- The Bible says that signs will follow the disciples (16:17).
- But Jesus discouraged seeking out signs and wonders because Satan can do wonders, too.

How many times in Mark have we seen Jesus leave an area because working miracles was hindering his preaching? We should focus on the main things ...

- Preach the Good News (Mk 16:15).

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<sup>1</sup> William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark NICNT* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), p. 277.

- Make disciples and obey what we have been taught (Mt 28:19-20).

But these Pharisees do not have the ability to properly judge who Jesus is.

- They are too prejudiced to see clearly.
- They are too invested in their own authority.

Jesus abruptly leaves because nothing more can be gained by talking with them. They do not see, do not understand.

Mark now turns his attention to the disciples understanding of Jesus.

## **2. The Disciples Fail, Again, 8:14-21.**

‘But the disciples had forgotten to bring any food. Not only does Jesus walk away, but he also gets into a boat to leave the Pharisees far behind.

They had only one loaf of bread with them in the boat. <sup>15</sup> As they were crossing the lake, Jesus warned them, “Watch out! Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod.” <sup>16</sup> At this they began to argue with each other because they hadn’t brought any bread. <sup>17</sup> Jesus knew what they were saying, so he said, “Why are you arguing about having no bread? Don’t you know or understand even yet? Are your hearts too hard to take it in? <sup>18</sup> ‘You have eyes—can’t you see? You have ears—can’t you hear?’ Don’t you remember anything at all? <sup>19</sup> When I fed the 5,000 with five loaves of bread, how many baskets of leftovers did you pick up afterward?” “Twelve,” they said. <sup>20</sup> “And when I fed the 4,000 with seven loaves, how many large baskets of leftovers did you pick up?” “Seven,” they said. <sup>21</sup> “Don’t you understand yet?” he asked them (8:14-21 NLT).”

The yeast of ‘Herod’ is important but hold the thought.

The yeast of the Pharisees is the position that signs are needed to prove Jesus is of God.  
The yeast of Herod is political power.

The disciples are so earthly minded they are talking about bread when Jesus is talking to them about faith / unbelief. Let’s be careful. Unbelief in a church can spread faster than gossip.

Jesus uses 9 questions to highlight the disciples’ blindness.

1. Why bread? It is not important.
2. Don’t you know what I am saying?
3. Hearts are hard. They need to open their hearts through belief.
4. Eyes that can’t see. They saw but did not understand. This is important for the next story.

5. Ears that can't hear. You hear my words but don't comprehend.
6. Remember the miracles? They have seen incredible miracles.
7. I fed 5,000 – how many baskets? 12
8. I fed 4,000 Gentiles – how many baskets? 7
9. Do you understand? Apparently not.

They were the same as the crowd. They saw and heard everything, but they did not understand the deeper meaning.

Like the Pharisees, they don't have a category for someone like Jesus.

- We learn so much in life by observing 'this is like that.'
- But this is the first time for someone like Jesus, they have no reference point by which to compare.

The story continues ...

### **3. The Disciples, Beginning to See, 8:22-25.**

This next story is a word picture, a metaphor for what is happening to the disciples – they are learning to see who Jesus really is.

'When they arrived at Bethsaida, some people brought a blind man to Jesus, and they begged him to touch the man and heal him. <sup>23</sup>Jesus took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village. Then, spitting on the man's eyes, he laid his hands on him and asked, "Can you see anything now?" <sup>24</sup>The man looked around. "Yes," he said, "I see people, but I can't see them very clearly. They look like trees walking around." <sup>25</sup>Then Jesus placed his hands on the man's eyes again, and his eyes were opened. His sight was completely restored, and he could see everything clearly. <sup>26</sup>Jesus sent him away, saying, "Don't go back into the village on your way home (Mk 8:22-25 NLT).'"

This is the third time Jesus removes people before a miracle. He removed ...

- The professional mourners to heal Jairus' daughter (5:35-43).
- The deaf man from the crowd to communicate with him (7:33).
- This man to build a relationship – holding hands and leading him – to ascertain his faith and to avoid the crowds.

The two stage healing points to the authenticity of the miracle.

- He must have had sight when younger because he knew what trees looked like.
- An in-between stage between blindness and seeing clearly affirms a genuine healing. Modern stories of restored sight often highlight the initial sight, that is

not great and that over time the brain and eye muscles learn to work together for fully restored sight.

- In our time, most healings speed up the natural healing process. Some are instantaneous, but most seem to be like this man's.
- Jesus said that intense prayer and fasting is required for spiritual breakthroughs (Mk 9:29).

If the disciples had understood what was going on, they should have connected these healings with Isaiah's prophecy: 'Be strong, do not fear; your God will come ... <sup>5</sup> Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. <sup>6</sup> Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy (Is 35:4-6 NIV).' When do these things happen? When God comes.

Our blind man here gradually came to sight; the disciples gradually come to sight, too.

Mark carefully compiled his eyewitness account to lead us here ...

#### **4. 'You are the Messiah,' 8:26-30.**

'Jesus and his disciples left Galilee and went up to the villages near Caesarea Philippi (8:26 NLT).'

Location is important here. Caesarea Philippi is where Herod Philip made his palace and there was a temple to the Greek God Pan here.

- There were strong Roman allegiances here – they easily shouted, 'Caesar is LORD.'
- What better place for the disciples to declare, 'Jesus is LORD?'

But first ...

- We have seen that Jesus is a Moses-like figure leading his disciples through persecution.
- Jesus casts out demons and heals many.
- The demons recognize Jesus and his authority.
- Jesus has authority over man made rules, even forgiving sins.
- Jesus preached repentance of your sins and taught about the kingdom of God.
- Jesus is the great miracle worker; he has power of nature, demons, sickness, and even death.
- Jesus was not John the Baptist returned from the dead as Herod thought. He was not a second Moses as the disciples thought, nor an ordinary prophet.

- Jesus even shares the Good News with non-Jews.

## Who is this Jesus?

'As they were walking along, he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"<sup>28</sup> "Well," they replied, "some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say you are one of the other prophets."<sup>29</sup> Then he asked them, "But who do you say I am?" Peter replied, "You are the Messiah."<sup>30</sup> But Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him (Mk 8:26-30 NLT).'

Jesus is not 1) John the Baptist, 2) Elijah, or 3) another prophet.

Jesus asks them this pointed question because from here to Calvary, he must change their idea about what it means to be the Messiah.

- He must make them into strong and passionate disciples.
- From here on, discipleship is costly; suffering and sacrifice are necessary.

Peter functions as the spokesmen to declare, the climax of the first half of the Gospel, 'you are the messiah (v. 29).'

- Peter's words are 100% correct; his eyes are open to see that Jesus is in a whole different category: he is the Messiah.
- Hallelujah, the Messiah has come!
- But the disciples have a lot to learn.

If Messiahship meant overthrowing the Romans, then this was the location to start – outside of Herod's palace. But Mark's very next sentence is: 'Then Jesus began to tell them that the Son of Man must suffer many terrible things and be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but three days later he would rise from the dead (Mk 8:31 NLT).'

## Conclusion.

We have seen that the disciples slowly learned who Jesus is, they slowly got to know him.

- I can't help but think of when Jesus compared himself to the groom and believers to the bride.
- Jesus said, 'Do wedding guests fast while celebrating with the groom? Of course not. They can't fast while the groom is with them (Mk 2:19 NLT).'
- This comparison is hard for us men, but it has nothing male / female gender roles, it has to do with the process of getting to know our God – having a relationship with God.

As a pastor in Japan, I was asked to help the single adults find spouses.

- The Japanese have a custom of formal introductions for potential spouses. It's called the 'Omiai,' or 'looking meeting.' Usually, a matchmaker makes the arrangements on behalf of the parents. This process is growing in Japan as it is very challenging to find a marriage partner.
- The matchmaker and the couple will meet in a public place and the couple will have some prearranged questions to formally ask each other. If it goes well, they may go of script and converse freely.
- After the meeting they will contact the matchmaker about further interest or not.

What stage is your relationship with God?

- Is it an Omiai – just looking things over?
- But perhaps you are at the stage of wanting to explore more?
- Or at the point of committing your life to Jesus?
- Or possibly the middle aged stage of joyfully doing life together?

Prayer / Song.

Holy Spirit draw us closer to Jesus.

'One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple (Ps 27:4 NIV).'

Jesus, draw me close  
Closer, Lord, to You  
Let the world around me fade away  
Jesus, draw me close  
Closer, Lord, to You  
For I desire to worship and obey