

The Gospel of Mark

(Mid-Week Bible Study)

Week 11: Seeing Jesus Clearly -- Mark 8:1–30

Picture another crowd. Another mountainside near the Sea of Galilee. Another stretch of three days during which the people have followed Jesus into a remote place, hungry for His teaching, slow to leave. Mark records that Jesus had compassion on them because they would faint on the way home if He sent them off without food (8:2–3). The disciples, who only chapters earlier had watched Him feed five thousand from five loaves and two fish, look out at four thousand and ask, “How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?” (8:4). They ask the same question they had already heard the answer to.

It would be easy to read this as merely a second feeding miracle. Mark is doing more than that. He is showing us how slow the human heart can be to actually see what Jesus has already done. The feeding happens (seven loaves, a few fish, four thousand fed, seven baskets of leftovers). The Pharisees promptly arrive demanding a sign from heaven, as if the food on their friends’ plates from last week had told them nothing. The disciples climb back in the boat and start arguing about forgotten bread, while the Bread of Life is sitting beside them. “Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened?” (8:17). The Lord is asking us the same question.

Then Mark gives us one of the strangest scenes in the Gospel. A blind man is brought to Jesus at Bethsaida. Jesus takes him out of the village, spits on his eyes, lays His hands on him, and asks the man what he sees. “I see people, but they look like trees, walking” (8:24). The healing happens in two stages. Jesus lays His hands on the man again, and only then does he see everything clearly. This is the only two-stage healing in the Gospels, and Mark has placed it here for a reason. It is a parable in action for the disciples themselves. Their sight of Jesus is still partial. It will need a second touch.

The chapter reaches its summit at Caesarea Philippi. “But who do you say that I am?” (8:29). Peter answers for the Twelve and for every disciple who has ever followed Jesus to that question: “You are the Christ.” Mark 8:1–30 is about the slow, costly work of coming to see Jesus clearly. We need bread we have already been fed. We need a second touch on eyes that still see in shadows. We need to give the answer Peter gave, not just with our lips but with the whole shape of our lives. This week we sit with the question that walks home with every disciple: who do I say that He is, and is my actual life consistent with the answer I give?

Group Discussion: Mark deliberately places a second feeding miracle, a hardness-of-heart conversation, a two-stage healing of a blind man, and Peter’s confession “You are the Christ” side by side in this chapter. Why do you think Mark arranges these scenes this way, and what is

he teaching about how disciples come to actually see Jesus clearly, rather than just have correct opinions about Him?

Personal Reflection: The blind man at Bethsaida saw partially after Jesus' first touch and clearly only after a second. Where in your own walk with Christ has your sight been partial (you have the right answer about Him, but the way you actually live still looks blurry), and what would it mean to ask Him for the second touch this week?

Read Mark 8:1–30

Study Questions

1. In Mark 8:2 Jesus says, "I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat." He goes on to feed four thousand from seven loaves and a few small fish (8:6–9). What is Mark teaching, by giving us a second feeding miracle, about the steady compassion of Christ and about His sufficiency to provide for needs we have brought to Him before?
2. Like the disciples, we often forget what Christ has already done in our lives. What specific provision, deliverance, or kindness has the Lord shown you in the past that you have been slow to remember, and how could deliberate remembering shape the way you trust Him in the situation you are facing now?
3. In verses 11–13 the Pharisees come and ask Jesus for a sign from heaven, "to test him." He sighs deeply in His spirit and refuses, saying, "No sign will be given to this generation" (8:12). What is Jesus teaching about the difference between honest seeking and sign-demanding unbelief, and why does He refuse to feed a heart that is not really willing to hear?
4. Where in your life have you been quietly setting conditions on God ("If you would just do this, then I would believe you about that") instead of trusting what He has already said and shown, and what would it look like to lay those conditions down this week and walk by faith in what He has already revealed?
5. Jesus warns the disciples, "Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod" (8:15). The disciples think He is talking about literal bread. What is Jesus actually warning against (compare Matthew 16:11–12; Luke 12:1), what is the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod, and how do those two errors still threaten the church and the believer today?
6. Pharisee-leaven (religious hypocrisy and externalism) and Herod-leaven (worldly compromise and the love of comfort, position, and power) usually grow quietly. Which of these two leavens is more likely to be working in your own life right now, and what is the small, specific cup of dough you need to throw out before it spreads further?
7. In verses 17–21 Jesus asks the disciples a string of urgent questions: "Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember?" What is Christ teaching about the kind of heart problem that

disciples can have even after long exposure to Him, and how does this connect to the warning of Mark 4:24, Hebrews 3:7–15, and 2 Peter 1:5–11?

8. Long-time believers can experience an erosion of fresh perception of Christ even while remaining faithful in outward practice. Where in your own walk has your perception of Christ gone dull, and what specific spiritual practice has the Lord been quietly inviting you back into to restore your sight?
9. At Caesarea Philippi Jesus asks the disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” and then, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answers, “You are the Christ” (8:27–29). Connecting this confession with Matthew 16:13–19, John 20:28–31, Acts 8:35–37, Romans 10:9–10, and 1 John 4:15, what is the central confession of Christian faith, why is this confession essential to becoming a disciple, and what does it actually mean to confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God?
10. The two-stage healing of the blind man and Peter’s confession are placed next to each other on purpose. Peter has the right answer about Jesus, but the next paragraph will show that he still does not see clearly what kind of Christ Jesus actually is. Where in your own life is your answer about Jesus correct while your sight is still partial, and what one step of obedience could you take this week to put yourself in front of Him for the second touch?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Isaiah 35:5, the promised opening of the eyes of the blind when the LORD comes; Matthew 16:13–20, Matthew’s fuller account of Peter’s confession and Christ’s church; John 20:30–31, why John wrote his Gospel, that we may believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; Romans 10:9–10, the confession of Jesus as Lord and the saving faith of the heart; Acts 8:34–39, the Ethiopian’s confession and his baptism into Christ.