

The Quarterly

A landscape photograph of a mountain valley. In the foreground, a dense forest of dark green trees covers a hillside. In the middle ground, a calm lake is visible on the left side. The background features a large, rugged mountain range under a cloudy, overcast sky. The overall tone is muted and atmospheric.

Mark 1–8



Cities Church

Art Direction & Design

Ryan Leichty

Editors

Michael Thiel

Jonathan Parnell

Tom Keefe

Contributors

Caitlin Boon

Mike Schumann

Emily Thiel

Larry Martini

Lynn Martini

Nick Aufenkamp

Amelia Schumann

Sara Krych

Michael Backus

Rebecca Mathison

Todd Mathison

Wendy Wester

The Quarterly is a publication of Cities Church that complements our current sermon series. It includes Bible study resources and articles from our congregation.

Website

www.citieschurch.com

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On Your Mark

Jonathan
Parnell

1

“Leads” are a big deal when it comes to writing. That first sentence is meant to hook you. Whether it’s “Call me Ishmael” or “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...” or, as the best-seller of all history starts, “In the beginning God...”, leads beckon the reader to continue. *Keep on* — the subtext goes — *the best is yet to come*.

And then sometimes leads are just straightforward and plain, like with the Gospel of Mark.

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the son of God.

Mark’s first sentence is indicative of the entire book. It’s concise and to-the-point, and it sort of reads with a beautiful lack of self-awareness. It sounds like you might imagine a child would talk when she has wonderful news to share. There is more to say, no doubt, but he isn’t holding anything back. *This is the gospel of Jesus Christ! I’ve got the gospel! This is how it happened!*

Mark is eager to spread the tidings — and he’s only going to mention wild animals and green grass when they matter (see Mark 1:13; 6:39).

Because they do matter. Every word matters. Mark’s economy and fast-paced style drives home that point.

Mark has commonly been considered the first Gospel written, what scholars call “Markan priority.” It suggests that although it comes second in the traditional list, it actually has the earliest date and the Gospels of Matthew and Mark relied upon it as a

source. There is also speculation about Mark's intended audience. Many believe it to be Roman Gentiles who had caught wind of Jesus's story and its earth-shaking claims, but needed something on paper. Mark must have them in mind, many say, because of the relatively few Old Testament quotes among other clues (Gentiles would have been less familiar with Jewish customs).

Whether this is the case or not, the Gospel of Mark is uniquely suited for modern American readers — all the Gospels are, really, and the whole Bible while we're at it — but Mark especially makes its mark because of “the abruptness and breathless speed of the narrative,” as one pastor puts it (his name rhymes with Teller). He says it like this:

This Gospel conveys, then, something important about Jesus. He is not merely a historical figure, but a living reality, a person who addresses us *today*.

I hope you bring your friends.

Week 1

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS AT HAND;

REPENT AND BELIEVE IN THE GOSPEL.

8

The Baptizer

Tom Keefe

The Son of God did not need John the Baptist.

The book of Mark begins with a dramatic declaration that the gospel, the good news of the story, would be about Jesus, the Son of God. But the text (consistent with the entirety of the book) moves quickly in describing one who would “prepare the way of the Lord” (Mark 1:3).

It is possible to misunderstand the purpose of these prophetic words and conclude that Jesus, in some way relating to his mission or his identity, relied on the work of the John the Baptist. But that’s not the case.

Rather, in harmony with the prophetic books of Isaiah and Malachi, John the Baptist is the forerunner to Jesus. The evangelist Mark begins his Gospel of Jesus Christ not with Jesus, but with a prophecy of his messenger, immediately introducing us to the work and ministry of John the Baptist. In light of what the Old Testament teaches, and of the description given of John’s birth, he had a pretty important role.

So herein lies the tension: the Son of God did not need John the Baptist, but the Son of God chose to use John the Baptist.

What, then, does this say about the Baptizer?

Simply this: his mission, his location, and his message, were all historically and prophetically significant in the story of the good news of the Son of God.

THE HERALD

According to Mark’s narrative, the Baptizer simply “appeared” (Mark 1:4). For a world that had been bereft of a word from God for 400 years, John

the Baptist was the first indication that everything was about to change. A new covenant had been promised (Jer. 31:33), and victory would be had through the “Seed” of the woman (Gen. 3:15), but first, there had to be the messenger (Mal. 3:1).

God’s people had been promised a royal kingdom with no end (Isa. 9:7), and the King, Jesus Christ the Son of God, had finally arrived. So John appeared, and played his role in the glorious, royal entry. As described by Matthew Henry, John functioned to “lift his voice like a trumpet.” He marked the arrival of the promised King. More than any King that had come before or would come after, Jesus was worthy to have his presence announced, thus reinforcing and clarifying his royal status.

When I was a kid, our family used to over-watch a movie called the *A Knight’s Tale*, in which the late Heath Ledger played a rags-to-riches knight. At each jousting tournament in which he participated, the knights were announced with a blast of the trumpet and the words of a personal herald. A Herald who would explain why his Knight was to be honored. John the Baptist was the Herald of Jesus.

Throughout the first half of the book of Mark, those who encountered Jesus would often ask a version of the question, “Who is this man?” For those who were spiritually deaf, they did not know that this question had already been answered by the voice of one crying in the wilderness, the voice of a herald who had broken a prolonged silence, announcing the arrival of the promised King.

THE WILDERNESS

The setting of John’s ministry also provides insight into how he helped to “prepare the way” for the Son of God. Deserts and God’s people, at this point, had had a fairly complicated history. After the sin of Adam and Eve in Eden, they were cast into desert-like conditions, into the wilderness.

Following their rescue from Egypt, the Israelites were forced, as punishment for disobedience, to wander in the desert for 40 years. And centuries later, as the Israelites were exiled from their homeland due to their sin, they had to journey to exile through the wilderness. So, as John stood in the wilderness heralding the King, something powerful was taking place.

God had always rescued his people. Though his judgment was expressed in the aforementioned accounts, his abounding mercy was ever-present, and glorious as well. And now, in response to the herald’s message, people were going in droves to the desert to be purified and cleansed in the same river that had once served as a rescue for God’s people in the desert (Josh. 3-4).

The Gospel of Mark, a story of the good news of the King’s divine rescue of his people begins in a wilderness, and this is no coincidence. God would redeem and rescue his people once and for all, nourishing the arid, malnourished hearts of his people through the very message preaching by his trumpet in the desert.

THE MESSAGE

Once in the desert, those who responded to the trumpet sound and

the message that followed would find a man who did not meet modern standards of sanity, and would hear a message that was just as crazy (Mark 1:6). A “baptism of repentance” and a “forgiveness of sins” was vastly different from the hijacked religiosity of the spiritual elite (Mark 1:4).

In John’s message, he offered a preview of ordinances that would come to govern the new Kingdom. His proclamation would “make” the way for what the King was coming to do, from saving people from their sins, to encountering his people through the giving of the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8). As his father Zechariah joyously proclaimed, John would give knowledge of [the need for] salvation to the people of God, just as the King entered the scene to save His people (Luke 1:77).

THE FAITHFULNESS

As any good messenger, John got out of the way and allowed for the King, to carry out his work, and receive his rightful glory (John 3:30, Mark 1:8). For John, this meant that his trumpet blast would be silenced all together (Mark 6:27).

John completed His mission for His Lord and informs and inspires us to do the same. He was given the right words, in the right place, at the proper time, and so are we.

One commentator explains, “As the clasp between the Old and New Testament — the close of one and the beginning of the other; as the greatest of those born of women; as the porter who opened the door to the True Shepherd; and the fearless rebuke of royal and shameless sin — the Baptist

must ever compel the homage and admiration of mankind.”

The Son of God did not need John the Baptist, but we did. The Son of God chose to use John the Baptist. And John the Baptist was faithful and obedient in preparing the way for his King.

Jesus, let us do the same.

Day 1

- ① Read Mark 1. How does Mark begin his Gospel and what does this tell us about its focus?

- ② Read Mark 1:1. If Mark intended to have a title for his Gospel, this could be it. Why do you think Mark might use this as the title? (See John 5:18 and Romans 9:5).

- ③ Read Mark 1:2–3, Exodus 23:20, Malachi 3:1, and Isaiah 40:3. It is commonly understood that Mark was writing for a broad Gentile audience, and yet he begins with an Old Testament quote. Why is it significant that Mark applies these texts to John the Baptist?

- ④ Read Mark 1:4–8. What details does Mark choose to add about John the Baptist and? Which details does Mark leave out? See Luke 1; 3:7–14; Matthew 3:7–10.

- ⑤ Read Mark 1:4–8 and John 5:30–47. Why do you think Jesus calls John a “burning and shining lamp” in John 5:35? From these two passages what is Jesus calling you to be and do as a person to find life and be a shining lamp?

Day 2

- ① Read Mark 1:9–11. There are three things at Jesus’s baptism that signify that the kingdom of God was at hand: the heavens were torn open, the Spirit descended, and the heavenly voice spoke. Compare with Genesis 1:1–3. Describe how all three parties of the trinity are present in both of these critical events.

- ② Read Mark 1:9–11. Why did Jesus get baptized?

- ③ Read Mark 1:12–13, Matthew 4:1–11, and Luke 4:1–13. Jesus is immediately sent on a mission after the glorious baptism. In what ways is Jesus’s encounter with Satan a trial? Why is it significant that the Spirit is the one who led him to the wilderness?

- ④ Read Mark 1:12–13. Study 1 John 3:8. What does the passage teach about Satan?

- ⑤ Read Mark 1:9–13 and look for parallels with Genesis 1:1–5, 3:1–5.

Day 3

- ① The “gospel” or the “good news” has its roots in military victories (the winning army would proclaim the news of their victory). But the prophet Isaiah uses this concept and applies it to God breaking in and saving people, and thus bringing peace. Study Isaiah 52:7 and 61:1–3 (see also Ephesians 2 looking for the word “peace”). In what ways can the gospel bring peace to your life today?
- ② What is baptism? Compare and contrast the baptism from John (1:1–8) with the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1:9–11). What details are included in 1:1–11 that help shape your viewpoint of what baptism is? What is the purpose of baptism for the church after Jesus’s death and resurrection? See Romans 6:4, Colossians 2:12, 1 Peter 3:18–22, Acts 2:37–38, 8:11–16, 8:36–39, 9:17–19, 10:44–48, 16:3–34, and 19:1–7.

Sermon Notes

Week 1

FOLLOW ME,
AND I WILL
MAKE YOU

BECOME
FISHERS OF
MEN.

有 何
有 何
有 何

Who am I? My story is boring; it's not very interesting. Yet, it's beautiful. Why? Because God wrote it. It's taken me a while to embrace that truth.

As a child I heard the story that God was perfect and holy. I heard that I was a sinner separated from God only to be made right with Him through the blood of Jesus. And I believed. I believed, but I believed as a child.

Growing up, my siblings always called me the 'angel' child. I was a really good kid, and I knew it. I was a rule follower to the max. People would often praise me for being so nice and sweet, and

I took those things to heart. I believed that I must keep up the perfect Christian girl identity at all times. It was pretty easy to me because it had become natural; however, the pressure to always do the right thing was eating away at me. How could I keep this up?

During my freshman year of college, I decided to be involved in everything I could because I thought that was what good Christians do. I didn't want to waste any time. I took a full class load, joined a homeless ministry, kids after school program, Campus Outreach and worked many hours. In all these activities, I felt like

my role was to keep everyone happy and at peace. Everything was fine for a little bit, but the pressures of all these things started piling up. I felt the need to be a perfect friend to everyone but the intensity of trying to balance all these different things seemed impossible.

I began to see more and more how impossible it was to keep up all these things. I couldn't do it anymore. The pressures seemed unbearable. How was I supposed to keep everyone happy with me? I couldn't. I was trying so hard to please man, and I could never get it. It was utterly exhausting.

I had joined a Bible Study on my hall, and during it they kept talking about the weight of sin and the beauty of the Gospel. I didn't understand why they were emphasizing sin so much. But all of this talk opened my eyes to see that this people pleasing was a sin. It was ingrained and intertwined in everything I did. It wasn't just a small thing — it was a huge offense against God. I knew I was a people pleaser, but it was the first time I had seen how enslaving it was.

I had been trying so hard to produce my own righteousness and to keep everything together on my own strength. Ti-

tus 3:5 broke into my self sufficiency, “he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

This truth that I had heard so many times before had a fresh, new weight to me. My eyes were opened to a new depth to see how deep the cross was. Jesus saved me from all the failures of my filthy good works.

That freshman year was a huge year of growth, but the beautiful part of my story is that God didn't just stop there. He year after year continues to shape me to understand the depth of what this looks like. He has been moving me from my self sufficiency and self righteousness to make me more dependent on Him.

One way he continues to grow my dependence on him has been through my singleness. As long as I can remember, I've dreamed of being married and having a family; however, that has not been God's plan for my life at this point. I've had so many moments of despair, of hope-

lessness, and of wallowing in self pity. My thoughts have spiraled into how there is no way I would ever meet a man that is interested in me and shares the same passions I have. The thoughts continue: "What's wrong with me? Is God leading me to a life of singleness?"

Yet God has faithfully met me in these moments of despair and reminded of his promise that he is with me. He will not leave me. He has a good plan that is so much better than mine.

I did start dating someone a few years ago while I was in South Korea, but he broke up with me and the intensity of

singleness felt even greater. Later in the year, I transitioned back to America and it felt like I was in a state of confusion. What was God doing with my life?

In a new way desires for stability felt so intense and deep. Through tears I cried out, "Lord, you say that you satisfy the longing soul, and the hungry soul you fill with good things. Help me to believe this." In this state of brokenness God was doing a work of yet again turning my heart towards him. Psalm 121 became my meditation. "He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will nei-

ther slumber nor sleep.” The promise that he was holding me and keeping me even when I felt like there was nothing stable around me was amazing to me.

Praise God that he has done and is doing a good work in my life and that he continues this over and over again despite me. He is good. He is faithful. He makes good stories even though I don't always see them as good.

Day 1

- ① Read Mark 1. Between 1:13 and 1:14 a lot happens. We know this because of John's arrest. See John 3:24. It is reasonable to consider John 1:35–4:45 as the events that occurred between Mark 1:13 and 1:14, but why do you think Mark leaves this out?

- ② Read Mark 1:14. Describe the region of Galilee – was it large and important or small and insignificant? What is the “gospel of God” and what does it mean that Jesus came to Galilee and shared this gospel?

- ③ Read Mark 1:15. What does it mean “the kingdom of God is at hand”? What call to action is Jesus announcing to the people?

- ④ Read Mark 1:16–20. Jesus's first recorded act of his ministry is nothing spectacular, at first glance. It's not a miracle, but a summons. Describe Simon (Peter) and Andrew's occupation. Specifically, who are they to follow, and why is this significant?

- ⑤ Read Mark 1:16–20. The call to discipleship is a call to service. And it is a process. It doesn't happen overnight. Describe what it looks like to follow Jesus. What other verses in the Bible to guide your thoughts?

Day 2

- ① Read Mark 1. Note 1:16–20 that there is a fellowship that is forming. Describe the importance of fellowship in this journey of discipleship. See Hebrews 3:12–14 and 10:23–25.

- ② Read Mark 1:21–22. Where did Jesus teach? Why were the people astonished?

- ③ Read Mark 1:23–24. This is Jesus’s first public appearance in ministry and Mark chooses an encounter in the synagogue. Who is the head-to-head encounter with? Why do you think the man thinks Jesus has come to destroy them?

- ④ Read Mark 1:25–26. Describe Jesus’s rebuke. What happens and what does this teach us about Jesus? In what ways does Jesus display that power today?

- ⑤ Read Mark 1:27–28. Everyone standing there was amazed. This story was not written in a vacuum where only a few people could attest to it. Everyone there saw it and they were amazed. What does that mean? Why were they amazed? Would you have been amazed also?

Day 3

- ① In Mark 1:14 we learn of John's arrest. The wording is really that of being "handed over." This phrase "handed over" is a special phrase for Mark and one we will see many times as the fate of the faithful. Look up and note the uses in Mark (of John, 1:14; of Jesus 9:31, 10:33; betray 14:11, 14:18, 14:21, 14:41, 14:42, 14:44; of Christians 13:9–12). Why is it significant that Mark notes the proclamation of the gospel alongside John's suffering of arrest?
- ② Reread Mark 1:16–20 on discipleship. Note that it says "I will make you become fishers of men." This process can be slow and painful. By observing the twelve apostles, note the challenges on the journey of following Jesus. How do you relate to these challenges in your life (give examples if you can)? Mark 8:14–21; 8:33; 10:42–45; 13:13; 14:37; 14:50.

Sermon Notes

Week
3

HE HEALED MANY
WHO WERE SICK
WITH VARIOUS

DISEASES, AND
CAST OUT MANY
DEMONS.

Day 1

- ① Read Mark 1. What declaration is made of Jesus in 1:11? This declaration is played out in the rest of Mark through alternating questions (from humans) and answers (from demons/unclean spirits). Read the questions in Mark 1:27; 2:7; 4:41; 6:2; 6:14–16 — and then the the answers in Mark 1:24; 1:34; 3:11; 5:7.

- ② Read Mark 1:29–31. “Immediately” is used 11 times in the first chapter and over 40 in the book and gives a sense of urgency. This may be Mark’s way of signaling the decisive action of the son of God due to his authority. What healing occurs “immediately” after Jesus leaves the synagogue? Why do you think Mark includes this story? See Luke 4:38–39.

- ③ Read Mark 1:32–34. Jesus’s compassion extends from close companions to the crowds. Jesus did not only help those closest to him, but also many people. And yet, in the midst of this, why does Jesus not want the demons to speak?

- ④ Read Mark 1:35. What did Jesus do to give himself time and space to pray? Why did Jesus want to and need to pray?

- ⑤ Read Mark 1:36–39. Compare this passage with Isaiah 61:1. Read Luke 4:16–30. Study 2 Corinthians 6:2.

Day 2

- ① Read Mark 1:28–45. Compare 1:28 and 1:33. Describe the feeling of a commoner in Capernaum as Jesus was doing this. What thoughts and emotions would you have?

- ② Read Mark 1:35–39. What is Jesus all about? What is his aim and mission?

- ③ Read Mark 1:40. What is a leper/leprosy? See Leviticus 13–14. Compare Mark 1:40 with Leviticus 13:45–46.

- ④ Read Mark 1:41–42. See Luke 17:12 – were lepers allowed to draw near? What does Jesus do in our Mark passage? How does this picture help explain why Jesus is so important to the world we live in?

- ⑤ Read Mark 1:43–45. What instructions did Jesus give the man? Why did Jesus not want the man to tell people what happened?

Day 3

- ① In Mark 1:31 we read that Peter's mother-in-law served them. This has been misused to relegate women to serving capacities. But I do not believe this was Mark's intention. It means to "wait on" or "attend." See 1:13 where the word is also used of the angels "ministering to [Jesus]." Study Mark 10:31 and Mark 10:45 to get a true sense of the word "serve."
- ② Mark records Jesus praying three times. See Mark 1:35, 6:46, and 14:32-39. What similarities do you see between the three accounts? How can Jesus's example of prayer impact your prayer life? Study Matthew 5:44 and Matthew 6:5-6.

Sermon Notes

Week 4

HE SAID TO HIM,
“FOLLOW ME.”

AND HE ROSE
AND FOLLOWED
HIM.

Jesus is the
Great Healer

Caitlin Boon

The four Gospels contain many stories of Jesus healing chronic pain and illness, raising people from the dead, and casting out demons. Jesus even heals from afar. In Matthew 8:13, Jesus heals the Centurion's servant the moment He acknowledges the Centurion's faith out loud: "And to the centurion Jesus said, 'Go; let it be done for you as you have believed.' And the servant was healed at that very moment." In John 11 Jesus allows his friend Lazarus to die and then raises Lazarus from the dead. These miraculous healings demonstrate the compassion and mercy of Jesus, along with the great power He wields. More than that, they lead people to worship and glorify God.

Jesus' greatest showing of mercy to mankind, however, does not come in the removal of physical suffering or deliverance from sickness: it is in the forgiveness of our sins. Jesus relieves the pain and suffering of some, brings others back from the dead (knowing full well that they will again die someday), but most miraculously He offers eternal life to all (John 3:16). He is the Great Healer and our greatest need for healing is the restoration of our right relationship with the Lord through the healing of our souls in the forgiveness of sins.

In Mark 2, a paralytic man is lowered through the roof of a building right down in front of Jesus as He is preaching. The friends of this paralyzed man believe in the healing powers of Jesus so deeply that they are not deterred when they arrive at the house where Jesus is preaching and find that they cannot get near Him because of the crowds. The men proceed to climb onto the roof, remove

tiles, and lower their friend through the roof, essentially demanding that Jesus address their friend. This is a bold demonstration of Paul's command that he would later write to the church at Galatia to "bear one another's burdens."

Jesus's initial showing of mercy to the paralytic man is not to heal his physical maladies, but to forgive his sins. Jesus looks upon the faith of this man's friends and is moved to show mercy. This is manifested in Him declaring the paralytic man's sins forgiven. Only after the scribes question and grumble in their hearts does Jesus restore to the paralytic full ability to move and use his body again. This miracle is not quite an afterthought, but it is certainly worth noting that it was not Jesus' first act. Additionally, He did not even seem to heal the paralytic primarily for the man's own sake but rather as a demonstration of power for the scribes which lead the crowd to glorify God. Jesus addresses the need for redemption, healing, and reconciliation first because it has eternal ramifications. Then Jesus further demonstrates his power by instantly healing physical paralysis.

In light of this story we must ask ourselves a number of questions:

Do we believe that the free gift of eternal life is more precious than relief from our current sufferings or the sufferings of those we love?

Do we boldly and expectantly bring our requests before the Lord, knowing that the greatest mercy there is has already been shown and gifted to us?

Do we pray for the salvation of the lost with the same persistence

and fervor with which we pray for the healing of the sick?

Do we believe that Jesus is not only powerful enough, but also willing to heal our broken bodies and minds?

Will we persist in prayer and pursuit of the Lord even when met with opposition and difficulty? Will we haul our requests and petitions up onto a roof and lower them into the middle of the room so as to humbly demand that Jesus acknowledge and address them?

Throughout the Gospels Jesus uses his authority over nature to heal physical ailments, which is a manifestation of the Kingdom coming to earth. In the instances where He does this it grabs our worldly attention and speaks a language we understand. We know this physical world. We know pain and disease and death. Jesus shows his mercy in a language we understand, then translates that mercy into the language of eternity. Jesus makes it clear that He is ultimately in the business of forgiving sins and saving souls, and He invites us to walk boldly in this salvation.

Day 1

- ① Read Mark 2. Review Mark 1:15 as the summary of Jesus's message. God is continuing his rescue operation for the world; Jesus is confronting evil; and Jesus is inviting people to live under his reign. How do the stories in Mark 2 highlight Mark 1:15?

- ② Read Mark 2:1–12. What kind of reactions does Jesus get with his words and actions?

- ③ Read Mark 2:1–5. What was Jesus doing when the four men brought the paralytic? What were the four men and the paralytic more interested in? How does this typify people's interests and focus?

- ④ Read Mark 2:6–12. This story of another healing unexpectedly turns into a question of Jesus's identity. Do you think Jesus did this on purpose and what is the logic Jesus is trying to use for the people? Describe what you learn about Jesus's identity.

- ⑤ What does Jesus have authority to do? Why is this a big deal? What does 1 John 1:9–10 say about sin?

Day 2

- ① Read Mark 2. It contains four events. In each event, Jesus is accused of doing something wrong. Jesus uses each situation to show his authority. Look at each section – what is Jesus being accused of and what point is Mark making?

- ② Read Mark 2:13–17. Track the verbs – describe the things that Jesus does. What does this say about Jesus’s mission on earth?

- ③ Read Mark 2:13–17. Study 2:17. What point is Jesus making? Based on Jesus’s intention in this verse, which camp do you want to be in and what does it take to move in that direction?

- ④ Read Mark 2:18–20. How does 2:19 answer the question in 2:18? What explanation does Jesus give in 2:20? For Christians today, what is fasting and why do people do it?

- ⑤ Read Mark 2:21–22. What is the point of the metaphor of the new wine skins versus old wine skins? In what ways has the gospel (salvation) changed you from old wine skins to new wine skins?

Day 3

- ① Read Mark 2:9. Answer Jesus's question for yourself. What is easier for you to believe "your sins are forgiven" or "you are healed from paralysis"? Study 1 John 2:12.

- ② Study Mark 2:17 and 1 Timothy 1:15.

Sermon Notes

Week 5

I CAME NOT
TO CALL THE
RIGHTEOUS,

**BUT
SINNERS.**

瓜哇里

合子

By God's grace my parents exposed me to the gospel at a young age. I can remember singing about the black mark of sin in my life, the crimson blood of Jesus's death that made me white as snow, and the golden streets of heaven that would await those who trusted in Jesus. When my mom asked me at the age of 5 if I wanted to ask Jesus into my heart, and trust in him alone for the payment of my sins, I happily prayed those words with her. From that day forward, Jesus would remain my only hope for eternal salvation, and I knew that on my last day, Jesus was the only person that could save

me from the wrath of God. However, after praying that prayer, Jesus became nothing more to me than a fire insurance policy. He was the person I could call upon when the time for eternity rolled around, but until then, there wasn't much need for him. I never doubted his existence, or the reality of eternity, but I figured my relationship with Jesus would begin at death, not during life.

Throughout the remainder of my adolescent and high school life, like most people, I wanted to succeed, I wanted to be liked, and I wanted to matter. I figured that the best way to make those

things happen was to figure out the system and follow the rules. I realized that if I practiced hard enough, I'd see the results I wanted in sports. If I studied hard enough, I'd get the grades I wanted. If I did what my parents and teachers asked, I'd gain their approval and praise. If I simply followed the rules and did what I was supposed to do, the success I wanted would follow. Avoiding the "big sins" (which in my mind were drinking, doing drugs and having sex) wasn't my attempt at sanctification, but my attempt to avoid the things I figured would hurt my chances of success. To the outside observer I

may have appeared like I had it together, but my internal motivations were to always make much of myself.

Heading into college, I felt like I had most of what I was looking for. I was gaining recognition for my success in baseball, my grades were good, I could talk to girls and I was making friends inside and outside of the Christian community. Jesus was given his due time at weekly Fellowship of Christian Athlete meetings, and the rest of my life seemed to be going rather smoothly without him. My definition of sin by this point was essentially restricted to having sex and

denying the existence of God, so everything else was fair game. I started drinking more frequently, pushing the physical boundaries with girls as far as I could, and looking for my worth on the baseball field. All the while I continued to identify as a Christian, feeling absolutely no conviction over anything in my life.

It wasn't until a failed relationship at the beginning of my senior year that I came to realize a couple of things. I realized that God was in complete control of every detail of my life. He could change any circumstance anytime, regardless of what I had done or any desire I might

have. This was a new concept to me. Up until that point, I had always assumed 100% of the responsibility for what did or did not happen to me. It was always something I could control. This realization led me to actually begin studying my Bible. If God was in complete control of my life, what was he up to? What did he want? I began to see that sin was not just something left to be dealt with at the time of death, it was something that needed to be fought against on a daily basis (and it included more than just having sex and denying the existence of God). Jesus didn't want just my eternity, he wanted

my life, and he deserved it. He had desires for how I should think, what I should feel and what I should hope for, and I needed to fight against anything in me that was opposed. I had always viewed Jesus as someone I had bought with my decision, and he owed me something for it. I came to realize that I was the one who had been purchased, and he was the one I owed everything to.

After realizing my life was not my own, I wanted to learn how to better honor the Lord with it. Through some connections I had with Campus Crusade for Christ, I decided to go on a six-week sum-

mer project to Zambia, Africa following graduation. In those 6 weeks I was saturated with Christian community, biblical teaching, discipleship and the sharing of my faith. I was challenged and encouraged by other believers modeling what it meant to live for Christ. I came back home with a hunger to know Christ more and make him known in the Twin Cities. I got involved as a member at Bethlehem Baptist church, and was fortunate to begin serving as a volunteer staff member with Campus Crusade for Christ at St. Thomas University. Through continued discipleship at Bethlehem Baptist, and my time investing in stu-

dents at St. Thomas, I caught a glimpse of the power of spiritual multiplication. By God's grace, I now live to guard the good deposit that had been entrusted to me (2 Timothy 1:14), and seek to entrust that good deposit to others.

Day 1

- ① Read Mark 2:23–3:12. What is the Sabbath? Read Genesis 2:1–3; Exodus 16:22–30, 20:8–11, 31:12–18, and 35:1–3.

- ② Read Mark 2:23. Describe the scene. Describe the disciples’s intentions. See Matthew 12:1–8 and Luke 6:1–5.

- ③ Read Mark 2:24. Who are these Pharisees? Describe their intentions. Do modern-day evangelical Pharisees exist? If so, how do you spot one?

- ④ Read Mark 2:25–26. Is Jesus’s response what you would have expected? What story does Jesus use in his response to the Pharisees (1 Samuel 21:1–6)? Why did Jesus choose this story?

- ⑤ Read Mark 2:27–28. What does it mean that Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath?

Day 2

- ① Read Mark 2:23–3:12. What point is Jesus’s trying to make with the Sabbath issue with the Pharisees? What is Jesus going after?

- ② Read Mark 3:1–2. Describe the motives of the Pharisees. Do people today try to accuse Jesus? How so?

- ③ Read Mark 3:3–6. Describe Jesus’s emotions. Why is Jesus upset? What do you learn about “hardness of heart” in Ephesians 4:17–24?

- ④ Why do you think Mark 3:7–35 follows Mark 3:6? How do verses 3:7–12 contrast with 3:6? What is Mark teaching us?

- ⑤ Read Mark 3:9–12. Why are some people following Jesus? From what you can tell, describe the depth of their faith at this point.

Day 3

- ① The Sabbath has to do with the theme of rest. And this theme of rest starts in Genesis 1 and goes through Mark and into the New Testament. When God created the world and then “rested,” he did not rest because he was tired. It meant that he stopped creating the world and he started running the world. The Sabbath is living in peace and rest under God's rule. When we rebelled against God’s rule we lost this rest and became restless. See Isaiah 57:20–21. Read Hebrews 3:7–4:11. Study Hebrews 4:1.

- ② Study Hebrews 4:9–11. What does “rest” mean to you? How do you “rest”?

Sermon Notes

Week 6

WHOEVER DOES
THE WILL OF
GOD, HE IS MY

BROTHER AND SISTER AND MOTHER.

A Damsel
(No Longer)
In Distress

Mike
Schumann

The Damsel in Distress — a common phrase born out of a well-known tale about a beautiful princess, evil villain, and heroic young prince. We've all heard the story. A beautiful, young princess is kidnapped by a villain and held as his prisoner somewhere deep inside the dark and gloomy gates of his fortress. Days and weeks go by as the princess sinks deeper and deeper into despair, until one day she hears the voice of a prince calling out to her as he comes riding into battle. He storms the gates of the fortress, defeats the villain, rescues the princess and takes her home in victory. It's a beautiful story — but not as beautiful as the one we have here.

In Mark we are shown another Prince — one who is also courageous, powerful, loving and kind. This Prince differs from the first however, not only in the degree of perfection in his character, but also in the object of his affections. This Prince is not after a princess, but a peasant; not after a beauty, but a beast. Rescue is on the forefront of his mind, but the steps of his journey lead not to the tops of the tower but to the depths of the dungeon.

The scene in Mark 3 opens in the synagogue where the attention of many was focused on a man with a withered hand. This man sat lonely and unattended, for though he was surrounded by the religious elite, not one of them made a motion toward him in brotherly love or affection. In fact, the Pharisees seemed entirely unconcerned with the health of this man, for he was only a pawn in their scheme, a piece of bait used to catch their rival, the Prince.

And why were the Pharisees after the Prince? Was he a thief? A murderer? A villain? No, the Pharisees thirsted for the blood of the Prince because he was not acting as the prince they wanted him to be. They desired a prince who would fit in their categories and follow their rules, neither of which this Prince was willing to do. This Prince was shattering categories and breaking rules by healing paralytics, cleansing lepers, exorcising demons, discipling fishermen, and eating with tax collectors.

As if this wasn't enough, the Prince was also making audacious claims, saying things like, "the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins," and "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2:10, 17). Forgive sins, call sinners, really? But most relevant to the scene in Mark 3 is the claim that he, the Son of Man, "is Lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:28). That was it, that was the last straw; the Pharisees sought to have one lord of the Sabbath and they were bound and determined that it would not be him.

This all leads into the moment in the synagogue with the Prince, the Pharisees, and a man with a withered hand — it was the Sabbath. The Pharisees were standing by, foaming at the mouth, waiting to pounce on the Prince. They knew that Jesus was about to heal the man, for it would be just like this Prince to do so. What is surprising to the Pharisees is that the Prince makes no effort to conceal his work. Instead, he calls the man to take center-stage and stand before them all. With the attention turned on himself, the Prince asks, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or

to do harm, to save life or to kill?" (Mark 3:4). The purpose of the question is clear: the Prince is seeking to not only shatter false categories, but develop new ones (or more accurately, revive old ones).

Like Hosea going after Gomer, we find that this Prince is in pursuit of the unwanted, and it's his 24/7 mission. Though the Pharisees had turned the Sabbath into the day meant to showcase their rule-following abilities, Jesus reveals something quite different about the Sabbath. According to him, the Sabbath is a day designed for the health of the people, a day meant for doing good and saving lives (Mark 2:27, 3:4). As Lord of the Sabbath, he is doing exactly that. So, without doing any physical work, Jesus simply speaks to the man and heals him before them all.

Like the prince in the first story, this greater Prince, Jesus Christ, is successful in his rescue mission. His rescue of the man with a withered hand, though marvelous, points to an even greater rescue of his, namely his rescue of the church. The true damsel in distress is the people of God who are held captive by their sin and are dwelling under the dominion of the villain, Satan. As mentioned, this damsel is not beautiful or innocent, but unappealing and sinful to the core. Though she had the opportunity to dwell in the land of the Prince, she sought out the villain's territory, thinking better treasures awaited there. Nevertheless, the Prince was bound and determined to save his damsel, and so into battle he went.

From this side of history we can clearly see that the battle was won by the Prince, though saving the damsel's

life required his very own. Having rescued his damsel, the Prince now rides in resurrected victory to the applause of heavens and worship of his people. Like the stronger man that he is, he has broken into the fortress, bound the villain, and is presently plundering the premises (Mark 3:27). What's more, each and every day the Prince is continuing to rescue more and more from the villain's grasp, freeing them from the law of sin and welcoming them into the kingdom of God. Oh may we honor this Prince by taking part in this beautiful work. As his damsels no longer in distress, may we too plunder the fortress of Satan as we are empowered by the Holy Spirit. May God use us to rescue more of his beloved damsels and may we rejoice at the increase of his growing kingdom!

Day 1

- ① Read Mark 3. Each section of Mark contains a series of incidents in the life of Jesus. Each one shows us something about who Jesus is — his power, his purpose, and his self-understanding. It is as if the gospel writer is pulling a cover off of Jesus inch by inch. Each story reveals a little more of who He is. What new thing do you learn about Jesus in Mark 3?

- ② Read Mark 3:13. Describe Jesus's intentionality, purposefulness, and vision. Review Mark 1–3. What is Jesus's mission?

- ③ Read Mark 3:14–15. Why does Jesus call twelve disciples? Mark mentions it twice. Why is this number significant? See Genesis 49:28, Exodus 28:21, Joshua 4:1–20, and Luke 22:28–30.

- ④ Read Mark 3:16–19. How would you describe this group? What do you know about these guys? What does this section (vv13–19) tell us about how we are to understand ourselves and conduct ourselves as disciples?

- ⑤ Read Mark 3:20–21. What does Jesus in verses 20–21 and 31–35 tell us about who is in His family? What are the practical implications for us?

Day 2

- ① Read Mark 3. Some have called Chapter 1 “Authority stories” because they show Jesus’s authority. Some have called Chapter 2 “Conflict stories” because they show the wisdom of his grace over against the world’s thinking and mindset. In Chapter 3, we see Jesus beginning the creation of a new community, a new people of God who will embody the kingdom of God. He builds this community through serving people, teaching, preaching, training, counseling, healing, and liberating. What characteristics do you want to see in your gospel community? How can you change and grow to help make that happen?
- ② Why does Mark separate verses 20–21 and verses 31–35 by verses 22–30?
- ③ Read Mark 3:22–27. Who are the scribes and what do we know about them? What are their viewpoints of Jesus? Who in our culture is like the scribes?
- ④ Read Mark 3:22–27. How does Jesus respond to the scribes? What is Jesus’s point?
- ⑤ Read Mark 3:28–30. Why do these verses cause people trouble? How can you answer the problems?

Day 3

① Read Mark 3:31–35. Describe the importance of church community and how church community compares to your physical family. Study John 19:26–27.

② Study Hebrews 2:10–12.

Sermon Notes

Week 7

TO YOU HAS
BEEN GIVEN
THE SECRET

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

Mark 4

Emily Thiel

Mark 4 contains Jesus' telling of the parable of the sower and his explanation of this parable. When a gardener or a farmer spreads, or sows, seeds, the seeds can fall on all different types of land. In this parable, the seeds are the word of God. Jesus and other people who share the word of God are the gardeners who spread the seeds. The different types of land the seeds fall on are human hearts. Some of the seeds of the gospel message, upon landing on hearts, are immediately taken away by Satan. Other seeds of the word are received with joy but the hearers have no roots in themselves and fall away when tribulation comes. Still others hear the word but the cares of the world and competing desires choke the word in them so they bear no fruit. The final group are hearts of good soil where the word is accepted and fruitful to no limit.

These descriptions of responses to the gospel message vary greatly. There are times when we as believers identify with the gardener, knowing the truth that our sharing of the gospel will not always be well received. At this moment, though, I would like us to put ourselves in the position of the land. Let's look at our hearts. Specifically I would like us to consider the middle two categories. Are we falling away due to tribulation and terrible things happening to us? Are we feeling burdened by the cares of the world and we just want to zone out so our hearts are not bearing fruit?

There's another way to word these questions: what is the center of your life? Our culture and the people around us likely believe that they can choose their own center of their lives. They can decide what is the most sig-

nificant driving force in life, the true center of their personhood. This can be a specific desire or, most likely, the self. The self, and focus on whatever it wants, is often the focus of the heart. We as believers, however, know that the center our lives is already prescribed: the triune God is the center of the life of every believer. The chief end of the Christian is God himself.

Is God your center? How do we really think through this question well? In his book *God and Soul Care*, Eric Johnson describes two ways that God can be our center. The first is that he can be our ideal center. He can be what we would like to — ideally — be our center. But the second is that he can be our psychological center. This means that he is actually the center of our heart, the center of our personhood altogether. God ought to have the place in our hearts as both our ideal center and our psychological center. In this parable, Jesus may be referencing both of these types of center. If we have heard the gospel message and have conscious knowledge of Jesus, the Father, and the Holy Spirit are our ideal center, we may be in two of the categories above that don't end of producing much fruit. If we would ideally have God as our center but he is not the actual center of our personhood, our faith can be compromised when we suffer or as time goes on and life continues to be monotonous.

How does God become our psychological center? How do we grow deep roots? How do we avoid scorched hearts? How will we grow above the thorns? How do we yield much grain? Even though we have been declared perfect in Christ, there is still sin in our lives on earth. There

are other things that will entice us to place ourselves as psychological center of our lives. But God has given us his indwelling Holy Spirit, who is our helper to re-center on God. As we go through the process of sanctification, we go through the process of recalibrating our hearts on Him. At the end of the parable Jesus says, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." We have been given ears that allow our hearts to hear the word that Jesus is sowing. So let us hear! Let us turn to the place where his true words of the gospel are explained and dive into Bible study. Let us intentionally put ourselves in positions to be impacted emotionally by God's presence through worship music, prayer, community, and corporate gatherings. Let us live in repentance by surrendering to God. We are reconciled with God through Christ and at the same time we are commanded to be reconciled. God gives us the gift of being able to act toward experiencing relationship with him. In these ways we can establish the joy of our salvation, we can be recreated with him as center by his word. God is working in us to recreate the garden goodness lost in Eden. He allows us to partake in this glorious reality in part now by growing us in the image of the archetypal human, Jesus Christ, who will come again to claim and renew earth as his ultimate garden for eternity. Let us be seeds that grow to bear limitless fruit.

Day 1

- ① Read Mark 4. We are now entering a section of Jesus's teaching using parables. A parable is a comparison of two things (an analogy). Jesus uses vivid and concrete situations in our world to teach us about the mysterious kingdom (ruling power) of God. Which of the parables in Chapter 4 impact you the most?

- ② Read Mark 4:3–9 and 4:14–20. What is the main point of the parable? Note the importance of listening (verses 3, 9, 13, 23, 24).

- ③ Read Mark 4:3–9 and 4:14–20. What does this parable teach us about the kingdom of God?

- ④ Read Mark 4:3–9 and 4:14–20. What does this parable teach us about the Christian life?

- ⑤ Read Mark 4:1–20. In what ways can we mishear the word?

Day 2

- ① Read Mark 4:1–20. Describe each of the four soils and their effects.

- ② Which soil would you identify with in your past? Why?

- ③ Which soil would you identify with now? Why?

- ④ Which soil do you think your neighbors identify with? Co-workers? Family members? Any specific examples of sharing the Word with a person that fell into one of these soil categories?

- ⑤ Read Mark 4:10–12. Who are the two groups of people that Jesus is referring to? Describe them. What is the secret of the kingdom of God?

Day 3

- ① The parable of the sower (4:3–9 and 4:14–20) sandwiches a middle section, which is private instruction to his disciples. In what ways is the center of the sandwich (4:10–13) the key to understanding the whole? Read Colossians 1:24–29. Study Colossians 1:26–27.
- ② What observations from 1 Corinthians 2 help shed light on Mark 4:10–13? Study Romans 16:25–27.

Sermon Notes

Week
8

IF ANYONE HAS
EARS TO HEAR,

LET HIM
HEAR.

Day 1

- ① Peruse Mark 1–4. What new insights are you learning about Jesus as we flow through this narrative by Mark?

- ② Read Mark 4:21–23. What does this parable teach us?

- ③ Look at verse 23. Why does Jesus repeat this command? What other passages in the Bible point to this idea? (See Jeremiah 6:10.)

- ④ Read Mark 4:24–25. What does this parable teach us?

- ⑤ How does Matthew 7:1–5 help shed additional light on Jesus’s teaching in 4:24–25?

Day 2

- ① Read Mark 4:21–41. What does Jesus want you to hear from these stories?

- ② Read Mark 4:26–29. What does this parable teach us?

- ③ From what we've seen in Mark 4, how does fruit for God's kingdom grow? What practical way can you apply this to your daily life?

- ④ Read Mark 4:30–32. What does this parable teach us?

- ⑤ Read Mark 4:33–34. What can you glean from these last two verses of this section as to what Jesus wants from you in regards to your heart and attitude? What is Jesus not necessarily requiring?

Day 3

- ① Study 1 Timothy 5:25.

- ② Review Mark 4. How can your life more accurately reflect the priorities of Jesus's kingdom? What steps can you put into place in the coming days and weeks? It takes some effort to form a new habit (anywhere from 18 to 254 days). But possibly in two months you could put into effect a new habit that aligns with God's kingdom. What will that habit be and how can you get there with God's help?

Sermon Notes

Week 9

HE AWOKE AND
REBUKED THE
WIND AND SAID

TO THE SEA,
“PEACE! BE STILL!”

112

Greater Than
Your Storm

Larry Martini

We live in large, wealthy, and powerful country. Many of us live a fairly comfortable life. When life is good, it can be easy to trust in our strength. The loss of Minnehaha and the hurricanes this last fall have been a reminder to me how little control and power we ultimately have. In the midst of life's storms (illness, loss of a job, death of a loved one), any illusion of control is gone. Where do you go in these unsettling moments? Do you give into fear and despair? Or do you trust God? If I am honest, many times I give into fear and if the storm is prolonged, despair.

At the end of Mark 4, the disciples find themselves in the midst of a literal storm. Waves are breaking into the boat and it is filling with water. They are sinking. Where is Jesus? He is asleep. In sleeping during the storm, Jesus is living by faith. While David was fleeing for his life, he says in Psalm 3:4, "I lay down and slept; I woke again, for the LORD sustained me." Jesus isn't a narcoleptic. He was demonstrating that same faith. Based upon the response of the disciples, we see they gave into fear. They said to Jesus, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" I can relate with the disciples. In life's hard times it can seem like Jesus doesn't care. That isn't true. Jesus calms the storm, something only God can do. Not only does Jesus care, but he has the power to do something about it. That is where we begin chapter 5. In it, we see three examples of people in the midst of a life storm. On full display is Jesus's love for these people and his power over their storm. It is my hope that these stories help move us away from fear and into trusting Jesus.

As soon as Jesus and his disciples finish crossing the sea, Jesus is met by a man with an unclean spirit. He is the first example. No one can subdue him. Night and day he is crying out and cutting himself. He is possessed not by one but by many demons. They have full control and are leading him on a dangerous self destructive path. The man lived alone among the dead. People's attempts to control him had not been successful. Does anyone care about this man? Does anyone have the power to help him? Jesus does. The demons are cast into a herd of pigs. They are powerful and cause the whole herd of 2,000 pigs to drown themselves in the sea. They are a frightening force, but Jesus is stronger. This man is shown great mercy and is left sitting in his right mind.

Jesus crosses back to the other side of the sea. This time when he gets out of the boat he is met by a ruler of a synagogue, named Jairus. He is the second example. His little girl is dying. He implores Jesus to save her. On his way to Jairus' house, Jesus encounters the third example.

There is a woman with a discharge of blood for 12 years. This would make her ceremonially unclean. She spent everything she had trying to get better, but no one had been able to help her. Jesus is in the midst of a large crowd and instead of coming in front of his face, this woman stays in the shadow. She thinks to herself if I can touch his garment I will be made well. As soon as she touches him, she is healed. Jesus has the power, but he didn't stop there. He shows that he cares. Jesus knew who touched him. If that is the case, why would Jesus ask who touched him? Jesus isn't just

some force. Jairus's daughter had a advocate in her father and now this woman did too. She no longer need to live in shame, but as a daughter she is brought into the light.

While speaking with the woman, Jairus is informed that his daughter has died. Jesus was too late. Didn't he care? He came and had the power to save. The little girl rose.

Maybe you are in a storm right now. I don't know if you will get the healing that Jesus gave these people, but you have hope. Jesus cares and one day he will make all things right. We can rest and trust now because Jesus overcame the ultimate storm that we will all have to face, death. Jesus rose from the grave. One day we will too. Let's fight fear and trust in Jesus.

Day 1

- ① Read Mark 4:35–41. Where are they? Describe the scene. What details does Mark include in this story?

- ② What does it mean to have faith in Jesus? What does this account teach us about trusting Christ?

- ③ What does this account teach us about the person of Christ? What does the fact that Jesus was sleeping tell us about him?

- ④ How did the disciples react to Jesus sleeping in the boat? How would you have reacted?

- ⑤ The antidote to fear is faith in something more powerful than the fear. What are you afraid of? How does faith in Jesus address that fear?

Day 2

- ① Read Mark 5:1–20. What do you know about demon possession? When you come to stories like this, how do you naturally (gut reaction) handle them?

- ② Read Mark 5:1–5. What details do we learn about this man with an unclean spirit?

- ③ Read Mark 5:6–13. Describe the interaction between Jesus and the demon possessed man.

- ④ Read Mark 5:14–20. Describe the reaction of the town people versus the reaction of the healed man. Define “beg.” Compare the two places “beg” is used (5:17–18).

- ⑤ Read Mark 5:1–20. What does this account teach us about the person of Jesus? What does this account teach us about trusting Jesus?

Day 3

① Study John 14:27.

② Read Isaiah 43. Study Isaiah 43:1-3.

Sermon Notes

Week 10

DAUGHTER, YOUR
FAITH HAS MADE
YOU WELL;

GO IN PEACE, AND
BE HEALED OF
YOUR DISEASE.

I grew up in a Christian home. My parents met teaching fourth grade boys Sunday school. My grandfather was a pastor. Growing up in a Christian home meant that I would be dragged to church each Sunday regardless as to if I wanted to go or not. During my time at church I most certainly heard the gospel. It just never really stuck. I didn't see my need for Jesus. I really wasn't honest with myself, and the fact that I was a broken sinner.

As I got older no one at church really asked any of questions of me. I just assumed that we kind of went to church and that's what Christians did. I started

to play football and it became my life. Not to say it's bad to invest in things you enjoy, but the way that I invested in football was idolatrous. I lived football breathed football and it meant everything to me. And I was good at it. I could work hard, lift heavy weights and then hit people hard. I was my own master, and I could earn everything I set my mind to. By the time I was a senior I was a good football player, I was all state. I had several scholarships offers to college regionally. I chose to go St. Thomas because it offered the things that I wanted. The football team was good, and I liked the culture

of success that the school seemed to give off. In my eyes I would go to St. Thomas, be a three or four year starter on the football team, and during this time I would get a education that would pay me a lot of money and buy me really nice things once I graduated.

This seemed like a good plan. Within the first week however the whole thing was derailed. My first week of football freshman year at St. Thomas was terrible. We had just weird weather in Minnesota and it was like 100–110 all week, and as a team we would go and practice in the middle of the afternoon. Guys would pass out

and throw up and I freaked out because I had had a cousin who had died from heat exhaustion the summer before. The next day before practice I was up in Coach Caruso's office sobbing my eyes out trying to quit something that I loved so much. Coach talked me into sticking around, but football wasn't the same. It never again held the same place in my life. Football couldn't sustain the value that I was putting in it. I ended up quitting the football at the end of the year.

The summer going into my sophomore year at St. Thomas I started dating this girl that I had really liked. We dated

for several months. It was good and fun at first, but over time I started to put my hope and faith in her. I expected her to do things that she simply couldn't. After all the stress, this caused she broke up with me.

This left me distraught and broken. I had nothing that I had put my identity into. Football was gone, my girlfriend had left me. I didn't know or have any of the things that I had put my identity into. It was rough. It sucked. My mom recommended going into second semester that I should get involved with a college ministry. And that's what I did.

I started coming around to Campus Outreach meetings. The people seemed nice, and I then went on the spring break trip. Someone managed to talk me into going on Campus Outreach's summer training project. It was hard at first. People pushed into my life asking deep and difficult questions. My room leader was this kind of weird guy from Iowa, who went to Bethel and didn't really seem to know the real world. Plus, he wouldn't really leave me alone. He kept trying to push towards me even as I continued to turn away. Over the course of the summer God did a work in my heart. Through reading the Bible,

listening to talks and seeing what Christian community was like I started to realize that God loved me so much. I realized that I was angry at God because he had taken away the things that I had loved so dearly, in football and an idolatrous relationship. Yet I came to realize that what he had taken wasn't comparable to the worth that I found in Christ. I came to realize that summer why Paul says in Philip-
pians 3:8, "I count everything as lost because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus."

As I have matured as a Christian I have continued to see the depths of my

sin. I still try to control and manipulate things in an unhealthy manner. Yet the Lord continues to show me his love for me, and his grace, and that Jesus is still worth it.

Day 1

- ① Read Mark 5:21–43. This passage has two stories. The second story, that of a woman with a “discharge of blood” (verses 25–34) is sandwiched between the two parts of the first story, that of the raising of Jairus’s daughter (verses 21–25). There must be a reason why Mark split up the first story. It may be that Mark wants us to make comparisons and contrasts between the two incidents. What two stories are in this passage? Compare them by focusing on the words “fear” (5:33 and 5:36) and “faith/believe” (5:34 and 5:36). How is faith displayed in 5:21–24?
- ② Read Mark 5:21–24, 30–32. Describe the scene. What are the crowds doing? If the crowds were pressing in on Jesus, why did the woman only receive power from Jesus?
- ③ Read Mark 5:25–34. Why does the woman think she was healed? What does Jesus say about why she was healed (v.34)? What does this teach us about interacting with Jesus?
- ④ Read Mark 5:25–34. What are the weaknesses or flaws in the woman’s faith? What are some things that the woman gets right? How is this story an encouragement to us?
- ⑤ Read Mark 5:21–25, 35–43. Who is Jairus? Based on his occupation, is it surprising that he believes in Jesus? Compare Jairus to Nicodemus in John 3:1–14.

Day 2

- ① Read Mark 5:21–43. What does the interruption of ministry to Jairus by the ministry to the woman teach us? Think of the people involved. Think about the time element.

- ② List 20 observations of details from Mark 5:35–43. What is one big thought you see fresh from this passage?

- ③ Read Mark 6. How are the disciples responding to Jesus? How are the people responding to Jesus?

- ④ Read Mark 6:1–6a. Describe the two emotions (astonishment and offense) the people in his hometown feel towards Jesus. Define “astonish” and define “offense.” How can this be? Are you surprised by this?

- ⑤ In what ways is Christ and his message astonishing and offensive today?

Day 3

- ① Look at 5:30. What does it mean that power went out from Jesus? Describe the power transfer – the woman becomes whole through Jesus as he is weakened. How does this explain the gospel and highlight Mark 1:15?
- ② Still looking at Mark 5:30, read 2 Corinthians 5:16–21. Study 2 Corinthians 5:21.

Sermon Notes

Week 11

COME AWAY BY
YOURSELVES
TO A DESOLATE

PLACE AND
REST A WHILE.

142

An Unexpected Life

Lynn Martini

When you decide to follow Jesus, you really don't know what you're signing up for. He will take you places never expected to go and do things you never thought you could do. It can be very hard, but more than that, it is beautiful and amazing. And Jesus is the sweetest and most trustworthy companion you could ever dream of having. I know this firsthand, and I think we can learn about the way Jesus uses people through studying the role of the disciples in Mark 6.

In Mark 1:16–20, we learn that Jesus passed by some fisherman, said “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.” Then they drop what they're doing and go with him. A little later he did basically the same thing with Levi (Matthew). It seems like these men knew fairly little about Jesus and what he was all about when they left everything to follow him.

Mark 6 is the first time we see Jesus employing the disciples in doing his ministry. Before this, they had gone along with Jesus, but now they are being sent out. His travel instructions are specific not to bring extra things along and to rely on the hospitality of the people who receive their message. They are to cast out demons and proclaim that people repent.

Then in vs. 30 the disciples come back. Apparently, they must look exhausted after their travels because Jesus suggests they go to a desolate place to relax. They decide to boat over, but by the time they get there it is not-so-desolate. Literally thousands of people beat them there. They want to see Jesus. Jesus is not annoyed, but has “compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.” He teaches the crowd

and then supplies all five thousand a meal out of five loaves and two fish, and the disciples get to pass it out.

When the disciples left their jobs to follow Jesus, they followed a person that they hardly knew. And even though Jesus proved his deity to them by performing miracles in front of them, they still lacked faith. This made me wonder why Jesus thought they were ready to do ministry on their own already in Mark 6. If I were discipling them, I would be pretty nervous to send them out on their own at this point. But of course, Jesus is smarter than me, he doesn't get nervous, and everything he does has a good purpose.

Even though this passage is about the disciples, it has good application for all of us. Jesus's work is for all believers. In a sense, he called us all to follow him and then sends us all out. Here are a few things we can learn about working with Jesus from this passage:

JESUS WILL TAKE YOU PLACES YOU NEVER EXPECTED TO GO. When the disciples were hanging out on their fishing boat, I bet they never thought, “Maybe next year I'll quit this job and cast out demons instead.” Yet here we are. Where could Jesus be calling you that you didn't plan to go?

WE ARE QUALIFIED TO DO JESUS'S WORK BECAUSE HE CHOSE US TO FOLLOW HIM. THERE IS NO OTHER REASON. Jesus made the decision. I cannot make sense of the disciples' role in Mark 6 in any other way. Jesus certainly didn't send them out because they were skilled or had great faith. In

fact, they were a pretty pathetic crew. Jesus supplied the power to heal and cast out demons. It wasn't because of their strong faith or great knowledge. When you do Jesus's work, do you trust in your own knowledge/faith/skills (or lack thereof) or in Jesus's power alone?

JESUS CAN USE US IN THE GREATEST WAYS WHEN WE THINK WE'RE TOO TIRED.

After the disciples got back from their journey, they thought that they were going to get some time to rest, but Jesus asks them to help with another crowd. They could have said no, that they needed a break. But they obeyed Jesus and got to witness one of his greatest miracles. Not only did they witness it, Jesus let them be involved in what was happening. Jesus sometimes does great things through us when we think we are spent. Do you trust that God can use you even when you're tired?

JESUS IS THE SWEETEST FRIEND.

He loves us because he loves us, and he saved us because he wanted to. More than his workers, we will always be his beloved friends first. God can use us in amazing ways, but we must never ever lose sight of the fact that, “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). Our God is kind and compassionate, not a heartless taskmaster. When God thinks about you and your work for him, what is the look on his face? (If you answer anything other than beaming with joy, you're probably misunderstanding the heart of God and the depth of his grace for you.)

Day 1

- ① Read Mark 6. Describe the various rejections that Jesus, his followers, and the gospel message faces in this chapter.

- ② Read Mark 6:7–13. How does Jesus prepare his followers to interact with the world? Are there principles in this passage that are helpful for us today?

- ③ Describe the process Jesus has used to develop his disciples (see Mark 1:16–20, 3:13–19, 4:10–12, 6:7–13). What other interactions has Jesus had with the disciples that you think are important in their development?

- ④ There are two sets of instructions (6:8–9 and 6:10–11). What does Jesus instruct them to do in each set? Summarize the main point in each set.

- ⑤ Read Mark 6:12–13. Describe what the Twelve did when they went out and interacted with the people.

Day 2

- ① Read Mark 6:14–29. How does the story of John the Baptist land on you?

- ② Read Mark 6:14–20. Mark’s account of John’s death is one of the longest of any gospel. Why the prominence in this gospel? What is Mark trying to communicate to us?

- ③ There are only two passages in Mark that are not about Jesus and both are about John the Baptist. How does John relate to Jesus in 1:2–8? How does 6:14–29 relate to Jesus? See Mark 9:11–13.

- ④ Read Mark 6:21–29. Describe the party. How does it end? Note 6:26. Mark 6:16 chronologically happens after 6:26. Describe Herod’s emotions and mindset in 6:16.

- ⑤ Look at Matthew 11:1–19. What important things do we learn about Jesus and John the Baptist? What main point does Jesus make in Matthew 11:11?

Day 3

- ① We have seen several “Markan sandwiches” thus far. In Mark 6 the story of John the Baptist is sandwiched in between the sending of the Twelve and the return of the Twelve. Why did Mark choose to place the story of the death of John the Baptist here? Death for following Jesus may not be common in America, but it happens elsewhere in the world. In general, what are some costs associated with following Jesus? Read Luke 14:25–33. Study Luke 14:33. What does this verse mean?
- ② Study Mark 6:12 and Romans 10:14–17.

Sermon Notes

Week 12

HE SPOKE TO
THEM AND SAID,
“TAKE HEAR;

IT IS I. DO NOT
BE AFRAID.”

REBELS
NO MORE

I was raised in a home with parents who believed the Gospel and shared it with me early in life. As a young girl, I remember trying to wrap my head around God. I had so many questions about who He was, how He could exist, and why I should follow Him. For most of my younger years, I wrestled with these questions. Our family went to church, prayed before we ate, and occasionally studied parts of the Bible together. I had many opportunities to commit my life to Jesus, but I didn't.

Much of my life was controlled by my parents who I love and respect. They had very clear and high expectations for my

performance in school, violin and sports. I was expected to give 100% in anything I chose to do. I studied hard, trained year-round as an athlete and practiced violin for hours each day. The expectations were difficult at times, but I also loved to be good at what I did. My success defined me.

While I wanted to experience the freedom of choosing what to do with my life, I didn't turn to God for direction. Instead, I believed that the world had something better to offer. One lie to my parents turned into a dozen more, until lying was so easy that I didn't even have to think

about it. I took every opportunity to binge on the things that seemed to make people happy: alcohol, sex, attention, and whatever else seemed exciting, new and fun. When my lies were uncovered and consequences were enforced, it caused a great deal conflict in our home. My parents struggled to know the best way to help me. I was pulled out of high school for a year with hopes that it would change me. I was depressed and would often threaten suicide. I remember feeling hatred towards my family and towards God. Out of the hatred, I started to question God's existence and would deny that any of the

circumstances I found myself in were my fault. After all, if God was not real, who could definitively say that my actions were wrong? All this time, I maintained my identity in my accomplishments while building new webs of lies to replace the uncovered ones.

My dad would take me to breakfast at McDonalds before church on Sunday mornings in high school. There, we'd use their Wifi to watch William Lane Craig's apologetics lectures on my dad's laptop. Half the time I was uninterested and bitter. My heart was so hard. But my par-

ents continued to pray for me and my salvation.

My rebellion only extended into college, when I was truly on my own. I binge drank, slept with numerous partners, and took part in anything that sounded like a good time. Out of guilt, I went to a Bible study where I was assigned a discipler, but I would bail on our meetings and lie to her about my life. Yet, she continued to pray for me as well.

During this time, I decided to compete in a pageant. I thought it would help me avoid the guilt of my promiscuous life and let me focus on attaining purpose

within the pageant organization. In my mind, if I could work on self-improvement through public speaking, fitness and community service, I could reach a state of contentment and satisfaction with myself. As I would learn, it was only covering up a much deeper issue. In my pursuit of physical perfection, I developed bulimia and an obsession over my body.

In 2013, I became Miss Minnesota and took off a year of pharmacy school to compete at Miss America and fulfill my duties. By this time, I had everything I thought I needed to be happy. I finally had the body I wanted, the attention I thrived

on, the pleasures I enjoyed and the recognition I yearned for. I had everything I thought a person would need to feel successful and satisfied. But when I finally reached that moment in my life, I felt nothing but emptiness.

It was at that point that God intervened in my life. During the summer of 2013, He softened my heart and broke down the walls I had set up. I began to listen to the people who had been trying to speak truth into my life over the past few years. I was so physically and emotionally tired of searching for something I couldn't find. For the first time, I wanted to sur-

render everything. And because Jesus miraculously changed my heart, I did.

Over the next year, I was overwhelmed with God's mercy. I cannot describe the feeling of knowing that Jesus died for the hatred I formerly had towards him. At first, I struggled to feel forgiven, especially since my sin had been so obvious, deliberate and damaging. But through that, I came to understand the magnitude and depth of God's mercy. I am thankful for the power of prayer, as many people spoke to God on my behalf. He answered their prayers in saving me.

2 Corinthians 12:9 says: "But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me." Because we are not yet with Jesus in heaven, I still feel the "scars" from my past, but they are a sweet reminder of my salvation story. Why? Because I know that I did nothing to deserve it and I did nothing to earn it. I know I need to continue changing my heart so that I can love and obey Him more each day. God has restored so many parts of my life and has given me

a purpose that frees me from the standards I once held myself to. I can look at my darkest days and thank Jesus for them, because they make his mercy that much sweeter.

As we sing, “By his wounds we are healed.”

Day 1

- ① Read Mark 6:30–56. Jesus uses a metaphor in 6:34 where he refers to himself as a shepherd. What is a shepherd? List out the various ways in which Jesus is acting as a good shepherd in 6:30–56.

- ② Read Mark 6:30–32. What was the original aim of this “getaway”? Describe the details of this retreat.

- ③ Read Mark 6:33–34. Jesus sees us as sheep and himself as a shepherd. What does this tell us about ourselves that we are sheep? What does it teach us about Jesus as being the shepherd?

- ④ Read Mark 6:30–38. Instead of a retreat, what happens? What is Jesus trying to get across to his disciples in their conversation in verses 35–37? How is Jesus an example of what he is trying to teach them?

- ⑤ Read Mark 6:30–44. Remember the Markan sandwich where the story of John the Baptist resides in between the sending out of the Apostles and their return. Upon their return, instead of rest, what happens? Compare the banquet that Herod had (6:14–29) with Jesus’s banquet (6:30–44).

Day 2

- ① Review Mark 6. Outline the chapter noting the big events and the big teaching points.

- ② Read Mark 6:45–52. What is Jesus’s purpose in going out on the water? Were they in danger?

- ③ Read Mark 6:48–49. What does it mean that Jesus “meant to pass by them”? See Exodus 33:19–22; 34:6. See also Job 9:8–11.

- ④ Read Mark 6:50–52. Describe the disciples’ level of understanding of Jesus. What are they struggling with in relation to following Jesus? How can we avoid this?

- ⑤ Read Mark 6:53–56. Describe the faith of the crowds at this point. If you were in the crowd, what would you be thinking of Jesus? If we really believed and practiced the teachings of Jesus and followed him, in what practical ways today would our lives be different?

Day 3

- ① Study John 10:14–18.

- ② Read and list observations from 2 Corinthians 3:12–18. Study verse 18.

Sermon Notes

Week 13

THIS PEOPLE
HONORS ME WITH
THEIR LIPS,

BUT THEIR
HEART IS FEAR
FROM ME.

174

Hypocrisy and Our Hearts

Nick

Aufenkamp

Imagine this scene from the end of Mark 6: Jesus and the disciples have just docked their boat and as soon as Jesus steps onto the shore folks recognize him and go into a mad frenzy bringing all the sick, handicapped, and demon possessed people from their town to him. Just imagine the scene Mark describes in 6:56 — “Wherever Jesus came, in villages, cities, or countryside, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.” How many people do you think were made well by even the mere touch of Jesus’s robes — hundreds, thousands, ten-of-thousands? Clearly, it was enough people that word was quickly getting around that Jesus was no ordinary man. He was a celebrity-like figure but, unlike the celebrities of our day, Jesus intentionally made himself accessible to the weakest of weak and poorest of poor. Jesus himself was bringing hope to the hopeless by making the unclean clean as he demonstrated his power over all sicknesses and deformities.

Already from Mark 2 and 3 we’ve read of Jesus’s run-ins with the Pharisees. Jesus threatened their religious authority by his claims to equality with God (Mark 2:6-12), his miraculous displays of power, and his growing popularity throughout Israel. It’s no surprise then in Mark 7 that the Pharisees are again trying to create a ‘gotcha’ moment for Jesus and his disciples. This time the issue is that the Pharisees caught Jesus’s disciples eating with *so-called* defiled hands. The Pharisees were hyper-aware of the ceremonial cleansing laws of Leviti-

cus and had even gone beyond what God has prescribed in order to be sure they were free from the defilements of the world. They were so proud of their supposed religious superiority that they jumped at the opportunity to condemn the disciples and Jesus by his association.

Jesus did not mince words in his devastating rebuke of the Pharisees, effectively saying to them, “You hypocrites! You honor God with your lips, but your heart is far from him. You worship in vain by teaching the word of man as the word of God. Worse still, you disregard God’s teaching in favor of your own traditions (Mark 7:6-8)!”

After reading Jesus’s words to the Pharisees, I had a strong urge to shoot up out of my chair, throw my fist in the air, and yell like I do when I witness the Vikings score a touchdown. Jesus’s condemnation of the Pharisees’ legalism and religiosity is so *right*, so just, so perceptive and cutting. But, as it often happens when I’m reading God’s Word, by about the time I was halfway into my victory shout, the Spirit sat me back down by convicting me that Jesus’s words are just as much to me as they were to the Pharisees.

As we continue to read Mark 7, we see Jesus turn to the crowds who are witnessing the whole interaction. He tells them that there is nothing outside of a person that can defile him by going into him. Rather, it is what *comes out* of a person that defiles him (Mark 7:15). Not even the disciples fully understood what Jesus was saying, so when they asked him to elaborate he used a simple illustration: anything that a person consumes does not enter his heart but his stomach, from where

it is later expelled. In one simple statement, Jesus destroys the conception that people are defiled by the things that go into them (Mark 7:18-19). Instead, he turns the paradigm on its head and teaches that “*from within, out of the human heart* come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness (Mark 7:21-22).”

In other words, it’s not the dirt on one’s hands that makes her defiled. It’s not the pig on one’s plate that defiles him. And, frankly, neither of those two examples are that surprising to any of us. Very few, if any of us, are going to express concerns about being defiled by enjoying bacon before Sunday’s church gathering; nor do we have a mandatory hand-washing before members partake of the Lord’s Supper (though the germaphobs among us might appreciate it if we did).

But, what about other areas of our daily lives? Does watching an R-rated movie or TV-MA show defile someone? What about listening to explicit music or reading explicit literature? Viewing pornography? Surely that defiles someone! The questions could go on-and-on, and to every one of them Jesus’s answer is a resounding “No!” — it’s not the things outside of us that defile us. Rather, we are defiled from within because *we are* defiled within.

See, within our hearts we have an appetite for evil, violence, and murder, which some of us try to satisfy with violent video games, others with fantasies about evil plots, and others still with the execution of those plots. It’s not the video games or violent movies that defile, but the

video games and violent movies exist, at least in part, to fulfill our hearts' craving for murder. The same is true with sexually explicit shows, movies, books, and music. Jesus says that humankind's depraved hearts hunger for sexual immorality and adultery, and that people create and consume sexually explicit material or engage in adulterous relationships in order to satisfy their defiled desires. And so on and so forth with covetousness, deceit, slander, pride, etc.

So, the seeds to the smallest of white-lies to the most grandiose acts of murder and hate all exist and are germinating in my depraved and defiled heart. And those same seeds exist in your heart, too. And the hearts of your parents, spouse, children, roommates, coworkers, and neighbors.

But — and this is a big *but* — Mark does not end with Jesus telling us how hopelessly defiled our hearts are. In fact, chapter seven is bookended by Jesus healing the hopelessly sick (6:53–56) and Jesus casting out an “unclean spirit” from a Gentile child as well as restoring the hearing and speech of a deaf and mute man (Mark 7:24–37). Mark 7 foreshadows that Jesus alone has the authority to make the unclean clean; to deliver those who are desperately defiled.

If we cannot be defiled by anything that comes from outside us, but are utterly defiled within; then it follows that there is nothing from outside of us that can make us clean. Just as we often sing, “Not the labors of my hands could fulfill the laws commands; could my zeal no respite know, could my tears forever flow, all for sin could not atone; Thou must save and Thou alone.”

We need new, purified hearts. And the rest of Mark teaches us how Jesus gives us the new hearts we so desperately need.

Day 1

- ① Read Mark 7:1–23. To learn more about the purity laws in Jewish culture, watch the Bible Project video on Leviticus (<https://thebibleproject.com/explore/leviticus/>). Describe how Mark 7:1–23 can be summed up as “religion versus the gospel.”

- ② Read Mark 7:1–5. The Old Testament, especially the book of Leviticus, listed out ways that people were “unclean.” If a person became unclean they could not come into the sanctuary of God and needed to wait until they were clean. How do these traditions and the system in Leviticus point to the gospel? How did the Pharisees use these traditions and rituals?

- ③ Read Mark 7:6–8. Define “hypocrisy.” How does Jesus respond? Read Isaiah 29 – What is the context and how does Jesus apply the passage from Isaiah to the situation?

- ④ Read Mark 7:8–9. Summarize Jesus’s main point.

- ⑤ Read Mark 7:10–13. Jesus uses an illustration to show how a person’s religiosity can actually contradict what God is looking for. Describe Jesus’s illustration of Corban and the point he is making.

Day 2

- ① Review Mark 7:1–23. Mark shows how he has arranged his writings for non-Jews with his various clarifications. Mark crafts 7:1–23 to show how Jesus and the Pharisees are in direct conflict and they completely disagree with each other. Mark also shows the radical difference between Christians and Jews. What was the true intent of the law and how can Christians leverage the Old Testament teachings to increase worship of Jesus?

- ② Read Mark 7:14. What is Jesus calling us to do? In what ways do you do this? What things hinder us from doing this well?

- ③ Read Mark 7:14–23. What does Jesus tell us is real uncleanness?

- ④ Read Mark 7:14–23. What do we learn about sin in this passage?

- ⑤ Read Mark 7:19. What does Jesus mean when he references the “heart”? Mark adds his own commentary in the parenthesis. What is Mark’s understanding of Jesus’s teaching on clean versus unclean foods?

Day 3

① Read Romans 14. Note each use of the word judgment. Summarize the chapter.

② Study Romans 14:12–15.

Sermon Notes

Week
14

HE HAS DONE ALL
THINGS WELL.
HE EVEN MAKES

THE DEAF
HEAR AND THE
MUTE SPEAK.

Day 1

- ① Read Mark 7:1–23. Summarize what we learned about sin and clean versus unclean. How did the Pharisees try to get clean? Then read Mark 7:24–37. How does 7:1–23 help lay a foundation for these two stories?

- ② Read Mark 7:24–26. Tyre was a city outside of Israel’s limits. Jesus’s trip to Tyre was the only recorded occasion that he left Israel. His visit to Tyre was entering Gentile “unclean” territory. Why did Jesus go to Tyre? Why is this trip significant coming after 7:1–23? What ways does Mark point out that Jesus is in an “unclean” situation?

- ③ Read Mark 7:26–27. What is striking about the woman’s request and then Jesus’s response to it?

- ④ Read Mark 7:28–30. What is the woman’s response? What does this teach us about meeting Jesus in faith?

- ⑤ Read Mark 7:24–30. Jesus does not teach in his tour of Gentile country (Tyre, Sidon, and the Decapolis). Mark notes many teachings while Jesus is in Galilee, but no teaching among the Gentiles. Jesus does mighty works of exorcism, healings, and feeding the hungry, but no teaching and no evangelism. Mark 1:2–3 signifies that the gospel to the Gentiles is the fulfillment of the history of salvation to Israel. How do these observations support the truths of 7:1–23? Describe the paradoxical responses of the Gentiles compared to the Jews in hearing the gospel.

Day 2

- ① Read Mark 7:31–37. Describe how the people in Decapolis responded to Jesus in 5:17. How do they respond now?

- ② Read Mark 7:31–37. What is unique about this healing compared to past healings? Why do you think Mark continues to give accounts of Jesus healings?

- ③ Read Isaiah 35, and study verses five to six. What is the significance of Jesus healing a deaf person?

- ④ Read Mark 7:34. Why do you think Jesus sighed?

- ⑤ Review Mark 7:24–37. What practical lessons do we learn from these stories?

Day 3

- ① Jesus goes to Gentile territory. Describe the significance of the fact that Jesus goes beyond Israel with the gospel. Study 1 Corinthians 12:12–13.

- ② We all often hear things but are not listening. Describe the difference. Describe a time (probably from today!) when you were trying to talk with someone where they heard you but were not listening, they did not get what you were trying to say. In what ways is Jesus's healing of a deaf person a picture of this? How is our inability to listen to Jesus a heart issue that needs healing from Jesus?

Sermon Notes

Week 15

“BUT WHO
DO YOU SAY
THAT I AM?”

PETER ANSWERED
HIM, “YOU ARE
THE CHRIST.”

194

See, Hear,
Remember

Amelia
Schumann

Mark 8:1–10 recounts a miracle in which Jesus uses just seven loaves of bread and a few small fish to feed four thousand people. The crowd has been with Jesus for three days, listening to his teaching. They are hungry to hear what he has to say, and he feeds their souls with his words of truth; but he doesn't stop there. Rather than sending them away with hungry bellies after three days of eating nothing, he fills their spiritual bodies *and* their physical bodies with the food they need. Moved by compassion, Jesus performs a miracle to provide bread and fish for the entire crowd, thus proving his identity as the Son of God and validating the authority of his teaching.

Ironically, though, in the very next section of the chapter, we see two instances of unbelief: the Pharisees demand that Jesus give them a sign, and his disciples anxiously discuss the fact that they have no bread for their voyage across the sea. Jesus reminds the disciples of the miracle he has just performed, and says, “Do you not yet understand?”

As we read from the comfort of our homes, their unbelief can seem ridiculous. Do the disciples have a problem with their short-term memory? Or as Jesus says, “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 the disciples' problem?*

If we take a step back, we can see that this story is intentionally bookended by two other miracles. First, in Mark 7:31–37, Jesus heals a deaf man. Then, in Mark 8:22–26, he heals a blind man. These men have

several things in common: they have body parts that are not functioning as they were meant to. The deaf man has ears but cannot hear — until Jesus heals him. The blind man has eyes but cannot see — until Jesus heals him. And the disciples have eyes and ears but cannot see or hear the truth that Jesus is so clearly showing them! Until Jesus opens their eyes, as he does for Peter just after healing the blind man (Mark 8:27–30), even his own disciples cannot understand that Jesus's miracles are meant to prove that he is the Son of God, the Messiah.

This is true of you and me, too. Unless Jesus opens our eyes and ears, we will not truly understand what we read in the Bible, and we will not be able to believe that he is the Son of God who has come to save us out of our rebellion against God. While it seems so obvious to us that the disciples should know and trust who Jesus is because of his miracles, we often fail to trust him in much the same way. We need him to open our eyes and ears initially, for salvation, and then we continue to need the other element that the disciples also lacked: memory (“And do you not remember?”).

The theme of remembering stems from the Old Testament. God repeatedly commands his people to remember who he is and what he has done and to tell their children (for example, see Deuteronomy 4:9; 6:12; 8:2; 32:7). They are supposed to write His truth where they will constantly be forced to see it, on their doorposts and hands, because it is so natural for humans to forget. Later, Psalm 77 shows how essential it is to remember who God is and what he has done,

and how bleak our outlook becomes when we forget. Look it up and see for yourself!

Like the Israelites in the Old Testament and the disciples in the New Testament, we need to stop and remember. Let this be a reminder to you: stop and think. Christian brothers and sisters, when was the last time that you remembered: The story of God opening your eyes and ears to the truth of who Jesus is? The depths of your sin and the height of God's mercy in forgiving them? The temptations God has helped you to overcome? The future home God has promised to give you with Himself? The way God has faithfully kept all of his promises throughout the Bible? The prayers you've prayed that God has answered? The plans you've made that God has denied (and saved you from misery and worked other plans for your good in the process)? The way He has extended his love to you by sending people into your life to encourage and help you and keep you company? The difficulties He has brought you through that have strengthened your faith? The times you've read Scripture and suddenly understood or “seen” something you'd overlooked before? The obedience of evangelism that God calls you to do in order to enjoy Him better?

If God has opened your eyes to see and your ears to hear, I challenge you to also remember. Let your soul delight in remembering his goodness, and tell it to others.

Day 1

- ① Read Mark 8. We now reach the middle of the gospel. Mark has been laying out the stories to help us gradually learn more of who Jesus is. And we have the first of two major highpoints where someone “gets it.” See Mark 8:29 and describe the moment. How did 7:34–35 point to this? Looking ahead, note the second high point where someone gets it (15:39).

- ② Read Mark 8:1–10. What are some similarities and differences about this miraculous feeding than the event found in chapter six? What might be Mark’s purpose in adding this story?

- ③ Read Mark 8:1–10. In the first feeding the disciples play a more prominent role. In the second, Jesus speaks in the first person and has a more direct compassion on the crowd and is directing the situation. Are you surprised by the disciple’s reaction in 8:4? Explain.

- ④ Read Mark 8:10–13. Describe how the Pharisees approach Jesus. Why do the Pharisees want a sign and what is wrong with this? Why won’t Jesus give them a sign?

- ⑤ Read Mark 8:10–13. Describe Jesus’s response and countenance in that he “sighed.” Ironically the Gentiles in the previous story who were “far off” are closer to Jesus than those of his “own faith.” What do you learn about this phenomenon in Ephesians 2:13–14?

Day 2

- ① Read Mark 8:14–21. What happens with the disciples in verse 14? How does Jesus respond in verse 15 (define and describe the metaphor of leaven)? What is the point of this metaphor?

- ② Read Mark 8:16–21. What happens in verse 16 that sets off Jesus? Why does Jesus seem frustrated?

- ③ Read Mark 8:14–21. What is Jesus trying to get across to his disciples? What does their failures teach us about ourselves?

- ④ Read Mark 8:22–26. What sickness does Jesus heal? We are about to approach a critical passage in Mark (8:27–30). Why do you think Mark puts this healing story between the rebuke of the Pharisees and disciples, and the story of Peter’s confession?

- ⑤ Compare 8:18 with this healing story. What does the healing point to in regards to a person’s faith? Describe the personal touch of Jesus in 8:22–26.

Day 3

- ① Review Mark 8:10–13. The Pharisees accost Jesus. They came out like a military. They wanted to get control over Jesus. They wanted to discredit Jesus. Read 1 Corinthians 1:18–25. What are the various ways people think about and consider Jesus?
- ② Study 1 Corinthians 1:22–25.

Sermon Notes

Week 16

IF ANYONE WOULD
COME AFTER ME,
LET HIM DENY

HIMSELF AND
TAKE UP HIS CROSS
AND FOLLOW ME.

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I was raised in a Christian home by parents who took spiritual education very seriously. Both my sister and I were home-schooled all the way through high school, and each day started with some sort of Bible study or class. I remember praying with my mom in our study when I was six years old, which is young, but I believe that's the day this journey began.

I am a perfectionist. I always have been. I can remember crying when I got a 95 on a math test instead of a 100, and that's when I was five. While my mom had high standards, I believe my drive and lack of forgiveness for errors was self-in-

flicted. These tendencies drew me to start karate when I was 14, and over the next eight years, God used that training and my karate instructor to become real to me in a way that studying the Bible hadn't done, at least not to that point.

A couple years after starting karate, I got into a confusing, disorienting relationship with a young man from my church. This, combined with immense pressure I felt in school, conflict with close friends, and starting on birth control due to some health problems, threw me into a constant state of anxiety. I started binge eating at my babysitting jobs (my

parents didn't keep anything "binge-worthy" in the house). I didn't know I was binge eating; I just knew I felt like I was completely out of control and would eat till I was sick, swear I wouldn't do it the next day, and come back 24 hours later and do it again. At the same time, my love of karate and exercise in general became an obsession, and my perfectionist tendencies made me turn to compensatory exercise to make up for the binge eating. I went on to major in exercise science in college, where my binge eating and exercise bulimia continued, and it only worsened during my master's degree when I

didn't have roommates and could binge in isolation and secrecy. The irony was that I studied this problem in school. "Binge eating disorder: a disorder in which an individual consumes vast quantities of food in a short period of time; characterized by a feeling of lack of control and inability to stop, and followed by feelings of regret and shame; occurs two to three times a week for at least three months." For me, this went on for almost 15 years. It took getting married for me to realize that this wasn't only a disorder; it was sin.

I'll never forget Zach coming home from work late one night early in our mar-

riage and I was waiting for him in our room, head bowed in shame, my stomach hurting from the pressure of food, trembling in fear of his reaction. I told him my history, why I would have nervous breakdowns on Sunday morning when I couldn't find anything to wear (due to feeling "fat" from binging), why I would spend upwards of 15 hours a week working out. That confession was the beginning of healing, but it would still be a long road. I tried everything. Education obviously wasn't enough; I was full-time personal trainer and taught at a vocational school for personal trainers. I counseled clients

on eating. I taught my students how to detect disorders. I tried restrictive diets, keeping anything “bingeable” out of the house. I asked Zach to keep me accountable; I even did a figure competition, hoping the twelve weeks of a strict diet would break the cycle. It didn’t. Every once in a while there would be a glimmer of hope. I went to counseling, and when I would feel the urge to binge I would remember that Zach had told me that’s when I needed to pray and ask God to help me to stop. I learned later that I would need to pray when I wasn’t being tempted that I would pray when I was being tempted to

ask God for help. There was never a time that I prayed that God didn't answer my prayers. The struggle was actually wanting God to help me.

However, the more times I chose to ask, the more I realized that God had a vested interest in my eating, and it wasn't just because it was hurting my marriage. I had become a slave to food, to the scale, to exercise. The number I saw in the morning determined my mood for the day, whether or not I would go out that night, and even whether I would be willing to have sex with my husband. It made me a liar when I talked to my clients and stu-

dents. And it made me unable to worship God because I knew I was worshipping something else.

Funny how much spiritual growth is like exercise. I started to learn that through my experience in karate, but it became clearer through my struggle with food. One doesn't always want to exercise, but one almost always wants the results of exercise. And the more one exercises, the less of a burden it becomes as those results manifest themselves. I didn't want to give up the "comfort" of food. But the more I prayed for God's help, and the more He helped me, the more

He revealed to me that it wasn't a comfort at all. It was a cruel master. And I didn't want to be a slave. All the rules I set for myself about what I could or couldn't eat, what food I brought in the house, how much cardio I had to do each day, all my education about nutrition and eating disorders, were worthless to fight against the hold my sin had on my life. It was only Christ's sacrifice that could bring me freedom from my slavery. And one day it struck me: Jesus died not so that I wouldn't be allowed to binge. He died so I wouldn't have to. This realization radically changed my perspective. No longer did I

see parties, long evenings home alone, or dinner out as an “opportunity” to binge. No longer did I dread social gatherings because I felt that overeating was inevitable, and no longer did missing a workout send me into a downward spiral because of a missed chance to compensate for overeating. The freedom Christ purchased through his death allowed me to start enjoying my meals, my holidays, even my workouts because I knew that the calories consumed or burned weren't what determined my worth.

The freedom I experienced in this area started to bubble over to other ar-

reas of my perfectionist tendencies. I didn't have to be the fastest, strongest, smartest, cutest, most put together mom, coach, or wife. "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48), yes, but that wasn't referring to the cleanliness of your house or the condition of your fingernails. When Paul refers to being slaves to sin, it wasn't just things to things like lust or greed; anything that is valued, or in which you find your value, becomes an idol and therefore a harsh ruler. Christ death not only sets us free from these idols, but gives us hope

in the work that we do. And this makes all
the difference.

Day 1

- ① Read Mark 8. Summarize the chapter and note the climax that happens from the middle to the latter part of the chapter. What are you learning about who Jesus is? Compare with Mark 1:15.

- ② Read Mark 8:27–30. Up until this story, the disciples, the crowds, the religious leaders, and the Pharisees have ranged against Jesus from misunderstanding to opposition. They have been slow to understand and have had hard hearts to Jesus. Responses of faithfulness have been few and sporadic and have come from “outsiders.” Who have been the ones who have declared Jesus’ true identity (1:1, 1:9–11, 1:25, 3:11, and 5:7)? In light of this, what is significant about Peter’s declaration?

- ③ In your world, who do people say that Jesus is?

- ④ For you personally, who do you think Jesus is? How would you describe him? What characteristics and attributes would you use? Compare this with Peter’s answer.

- ⑤ Look at Mark 8:30. Why does Jesus want Peter to be quiet about his identity? Should we be quiet about Jesus? Why or why not?

Day 2

- ① Read Mark 8:31–33. This is a hinge point in the book of Mark. Describe the direction that Jesus takes the conversation from 8:30 to 8:31. Is this what you expected? Is this what the disciples expected? What does this tell us about the focus of the second half of Mark?

- ② Jesus has Peter’s mind space finally. Peter is dialed in. Describe Peter’s thought process (8:27–33).

- ③ In Mark 8:31 we see the word “must.” Define “must.” What does it tell us about Jesus’s purpose and what he came to do?

- ④ Read Mark 8:34–38. What does the first “save his life” mean (v.35a)? What does the first “lose his life” mean (35a)? What does the second “lose his life” mean (35b)? What does the second “save his life” mean (35b)?

- ⑤ Read Mark 8:34–38. How do verses 34 and 36 shed light on verse 35?

Day 3

① Study Mark 8:33. Compare with Colossians 3:1–4. Why is Peter rebuked and how is this a warning for us today?

② Study Mark 8:36–37.

Sermon Notes