

Who Do You Say I Am?

Our Facilities Manager, Walter Berry, has this photo hanging on the wall of his office. [Show photo] "I'm with the bomb squad. If you see me running, try to keep up!" As a follower of Jesus Christ, are you keeping up with Him or have you been distracted by "things of lesser importance"?

Today we complete the first half of this "Handbook for a Jesus Follower." After today we're going to take a break for a couple of months and then come back to the second half of this handbook in January. But today, Jesus has a very personal and very important question for all of us to answer. Before we get to that question, Mark wants us to take notice of a couple of important themes in Jesus' teaching. The first theme draws our attention to...

I. The Importance of Bread

Jesus is now only about six months from the cross and there are suddenly a lot of "bread stories" in His teaching and His miracles. Just a few months ago, He miraculously fed bread and fish to over 12,000 people. Then the woman from Syria begs Jesus for "crumbs from His table" referring to her request to have Jesus remove a demon from her daughter. Now, in chapter 8, Jesus teaches about the "yeast" of the Pharisees and He feeds bread to another four to six thousand people. So, why is Jesus using all these bread themes in His teaching?

For us, bread is served at a meal as an accessory. If someone invited you over for dinner and offered you a plate with a dinner roll on it as the main course, what would you think? You'd probably say, "Okay, where's the beef?" Not in Jesus' day! Meat was a rare commodity. Bread was often the main course and this is still true today in many third-world countries. When Liz and I visited Zambia, a main course in their meals wasn't bread but another form of starch, a cooked corn called nshima. It was thick, like paste, and tasted about the same! But it was all they had. It's cheap and it will keep you alive.

The same was true in Jesus' day. Bread was made daily, except on the Sabbath, and it was such a main ingredient in their diet that the word "bread" began to be used interchangeably with the word for "food." So, with that in mind, how does it change how you think about what Jesus said and did with bread?

- When people were physically hungry, He gave them bread. (Mk. 6 & 8)
- When people demonstrated a spiritual hunger, He said, "*I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry...*" (John 6:35)
- When describing the kingdom of God, He used the example of yeast spreading through the whole batch of dough. (Matt. 13:33)
- And when He gave us a tangible way to remember why He came, He gave us bread and said, "*This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.*" (I Cor. 11:24)

Jesus took the main ingredient in the Jewish diet and said, "That's Me!"

How important is eating for you? How long can you go without eating? A few hours? A day? How long can you go without talking or listening to Jesus? How many times did you either talk to Him or read His Word last week? Would you say that Jesus is the “main ingredient” in your life diet? You say you’re a follower of Jesus; are you keeping up with Him?

The second thing Mark is showing us, as the first half of his gospel is coming to a close, is that Jesus keeps asking people...

II. What Do You See?

Back in chapter 6, at the feeding of the 5,000, after the disciples tell Jesus how many people there are to feed, Jesus says to them:

“How many loaves do you have? ...Go and see.” (Mark 6:38)

Here in chapter 8, after warning the disciples about the “yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod,” meaning the evil in them that could spread as fast and as completely as yeast in dough, Jesus says to His disciples:

...Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? (Mark 8:17-18)

Then, Jesus goes to Bethsaida and some people bring Jesus a blind man for Him to heal. (I think that what He does here is so fascinating!) Jesus takes the man by the hand and leads him out of town. Then He spits directly on the man’s eyes, puts His hands on him and asks, *“Do you see anything?”*

And the man says, *“I see people; they look like trees walking around.”* So Jesus puts his hands on the man’s eyes and then he can see clearly, his sight is fully restored. This is the only recorded miracle that Jesus does in stages. The man’s sight wasn’t healed all at once.

So, what do we make of all this? I don’t know about you but I “see” Jesus asking three questions:

1. Do you see opportunities for ministry in a problem?
2. Do you see spiritual danger?
3. Do you see the gradual progress of the work of God?

First, do you see opportunities for ministry in a problem? The problem the disciples faced was thousands of people without food. Once again, that’s all they could see. But what did Jesus see? He saw opportunities for ministry, just like He saw the last time they faced thousands of hungry people. Now, we can get all upset with the disciples and say, “How could they miss this lesson a second time? Why didn’t they remember the feeding of the 5,000?”

Well, let me ask you, “Have you always learned the lesson God is trying to teach you the first time?” Jesus is trying to teach you patience and you FREAK OUT because He didn’t solve your problem in 20 minutes. Or, did you think back to the way God did solve your problem last time and go, “Oh, yeah, there’s no rush here! Jesus has this covered. I’m just going to patiently wait for Him to solve it.” Is that what you did? If not, then let’s go easy on the disciples, okay?

I remember when our boys were young, Liz used to wear contact lenses. If you’ve ever worn them, you know how much time you spend looking for them! I remember one time that Liz lost one in the car just as we were hurrying to get somewhere. So, we’re on our hands and knees trying to find the lens in the carpet, when one of our boys says, “Shouldn’t we pray about this?”

Liz and I looked at each other and said, “Absolutely! We were just going to say that!”

When a problem arises, what do you see – a problem or an opportunity for God to work?

Secondly, do you see spiritual danger when it’s near? Jesus is warning the disciples about the yeast of the Pharisees and the Herodians but all they see is that they don’t have enough bread for sandwiches! (Men, always thinking about their stomachs!) Jesus doesn’t take His enemies lightly nor is He fooled by their deadly questions coated with sugar. They asked Him to perform a sign from heaven to prove who He was. Jesus sees the doctrinal danger in their request. They don’t want to honor Him, they want to go back to Jerusalem and say, “Jesus is doing miracles just to show off!”

But Jesus doesn’t fall for their trick. In Matthew’s and Luke’s telling of the same story, Jesus says, “[no sign] shall be given... except the sign of Jonah.” (Matt. 16:4, Luke 11:29) What Jesus is referring to is the fact that, as Jonah was in the belly of the whale three days, so Jesus would be in the belly of the earth for three days before being resurrected.

Are you alert to the dangers of doctrinal manipulation by the enemies of Christ today? Do you even know enough about what the Bible says to be able to spot teaching that is “off kilter”? Jesus warns us by saying:

Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. (Matt. 7:15-16)

False prophets, false teachers don’t wear black capes and name tags that say, “Don’t listen to me. I’m a false prophet!” They come with big smiles, a warm handshake and a promise to meet your deepest need. How can you spot them? By their fruit, by how closely their life habits resemble those of Jesus Christ. If their lifestyle doesn’t look anything like Jesus’ lifestyle, if their teaching contradicts Jesus teaching, then run, don’t walk, run away from them. Remember Jesus’ warning: they look like sheep but they’re really “ferocious wolves.” I don’t want to be anywhere near a “ferocious wolf.” And I don’t want anyone I care about near them either.

The third question that Jesus poses about seeing is, “Do you see the gradual progress of the work of God?” In other words, “Do you understand that sometimes miracles happen in stages?” Scripture tells of Jesus healing at least seven blind men. He used differing methods with most of them. Jesus custom-fits His work to your life. Do you understand that or have you seen Jesus do His work one way with a friend and then when He doesn’t work that way with you, you start complaining and questioning His love for you? You might think you know what you need, but I can almost guarantee you don’t. Jesus does. He promised you:

For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. (Matt. 7:8)

Are you seeing better yet? Hopefully, even this week, God will continue to improve your eyesight until you can see opportunities instead of only problems and danger before it’s too late. And through it all you’ll see that, while He sometimes completes His work instantaneously, often His miracles are a step-by-step process.

Now, lastly, we must see how this chapter ends with a bang because here in Mark 8 we find:

III. The Two Most Important Questions in the World.

I'm not kidding! These two uber-important questions are found in verses 27 and 29 which say:

Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" (Mk. 8: 27-29)

Jesus had been with these guys for 2½ years now. They'd seen a lot, done a lot, been through a lot with Jesus. They saw His baptism and heard the voice from heaven. They'd sat in on pretty much all of His teaching sessions. They'd seen how he dealt with critics, with children, with the sick, with the rich, with everyone from the religious leaders to the demon-possessed. They'd seen and heard it all. But every one of them could look you in the eye and say, "I know the real Jesus because I've lived with the real Jesus." All twelve knew who Jesus was, even Judas! After Judas betrayed Him, he tried to return the money and said to the chief priests:

I have sinned... for I have betrayed innocent blood. (Matt. 27:4)

They all knew who Jesus was because they had walked through life with Him.

So Jesus asks them all two questions:

Who do people say I am? And...

Who do you say I am? (Mark 8:27, 29)

These are the two most important questions that any of us will have to answer. Why? Because Jesus wants to know two things about you. First, He wants to know, "Are you paying attention to the people around you?" Jesus said He came into this world for people, all kinds of people! So, He wants to know if that's why you're here. Are you paying attention to the people around you? And most importantly, are you aware of who they think He is? Do you know who the people you work with or go to school with think Jesus is? Jesus is very concerned about that. Are you?

The second question is very personal but very important. How you answer this question pretty much determines how the rest of your life will go and it definitely will determine how your eternity will go. Jesus asked all the disciples, **"But what about you? ...Who do you say I am?" (Mk. 8:29)**

As usual, Peter spoke for them all and said, **"You are the Christ,"** which of course, is the absolutely right answer. And Matthew records, as I pointed out last week, that Jesus enthusiastically responded to Peter by saying:

...Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. (Matt. 16:17)

Jesus blesses Peter not because he said "the magic words," or because he lived the rest of his life in perfect obedience, because he didn't. He blessed Peter because he didn't seem to care what everybody else was saying (if you notice – nobody else was saying that Jesus was the Christ!). No, Peter announced what he knew from personal experience, from his own investigation of the facts. From that, he knew that Jesus was the only Son of God.

Do you know that? Have you told Jesus that? Have you listened to what He said to you in response? In the evangelical church we talk a lot about “Who do you say Jesus is?” But have you ever considered this, “Who does Jesus say YOU are?” If you are truly His son or daughter, how will He recognize you?

In the next paragraph after Peter makes this golden confession, Jesus tells us how He will recognize those men and women who are His sons and daughters. He says:

...If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels. (Mk. 8:34, 38)

Someone once put it this way: If it were illegal to be a Christian, would there be enough evidence from your life to convict you? Ron Evans is a follower of Christ from this church. He has a story to tell of how “confessing Jesus” recently took on new meaning for him. Please watch:

[Play Ron Evans video]

In this wonderful exchange between Peter and Jesus, what do we have? We have Peter confessing who Jesus is (You are the Christ!) and we have Jesus confessing who Peter is (You are my friend!). So, who are you? How do you answer that question? From where do you get your real identity?

Today as you leave the Sanctuary or the Venue, we have something for you to take and ponder. It’s a listing of 12 verses from Scripture which describe who Jesus says you are if you confess with Peter that He is the Christ. You know, there are many people today who will openly say that they are searching for who they really are. Jesus is your Creator. You will never discover who you really are until you are able to say to Him, “*You are the Christ.*” Is there anybody who wants to end your search for who you are right now by confessing who He is? Once you know who Jesus is, then you’ll know who you are. Let’s pray...