

Mark 8:1-33 | The Grace of Gospel Clarity

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Welcome back to GCF. I hope you had a fantastic long break, and I am really excited for this upcoming semester. We have some retreats, classes and conferences coming up which you will be hearing more about later. But before we get to that we are going to spend a little time in the book of Mark.

Mark is a book about Jesus, and Mark is showing us who Jesus is and what he has done.

Now some of you might be new here, maybe it's your first time and you are just checking us out. And what if I were to say to you that I am the reason why all these people are here? These people think I am something special. You would probably laugh, and think, "I'll be the judge of that."

But what if "Welcome Feast" was happening on the Oval. The university is offering free food to all the students, there are thousands on the Oval, hungry, ready to eat. But in some horrible turn of events they only brought five hotdog buns and three hot dogs. And what if I were to go up and take those buns and dogs, and divide them up in such a way where the thousands of people on the oval ate, and were full? Would you maybe believe I was something special then?

What if the next day we were all in the Adam's center and we were watching a basketball game, and after it people were hungry. What if I asked you what food we had and you said we have seven pretzels. What if I then took those seven pretzels and again multiplied them and fed all the people in attendance till they were satisfied. Two feedings. Two wonderful miracles. Would you maybe believe that I was something special then?

Well the two things I just talked about are two real events which happened to Jesus. In Mark 6 Jesus fed 10,000 people with five loaves and few fish, and right before the text we are going to look at today Jesus fed 4,000 people with seven loaves and a few sardines. Would you believe that Jesus is something special?

For those of you in here who are not Christians, I have one real question for you: What would it take for you to believe that Jesus is God? What would it take for you to believe that he is your savior?

For those of you in here who are Christians, "What do you see as the sign of God's faithfulness to you? How do you know you are right?"

Well Jesus is going to answer those questions for us today in Mark 8, and what we are going to see is **Jesus is merciful to the slow, and a sign to the lost.**

Let's pray.

So here is what we are going to do with this text, we are going to fly through it because we need to see the whole picture of it to make sense of what is happening. But what we are going to see in this text are three portraits. The first is a **Portrait of Doubt.**

Mark 8:11-13. So Jesus has just done a miracle, he has just fed 4,000 people with a few loaves and fish and he is immediately met with, "Hey give us a sign." But here is the thing with the Pharisees. They hated Jesus. They were planning with the followers of Herod to have him killed. They weren't interested in miracles, they wanted something so obvious that it could not be missed. They doubted Jesus was who he said he was, but

no amount of miracles could suffice, they wanted something fantastic as proof that he was God. But Jesus responded to them, “Why do you seek a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation.”

Now this is ironic, because Jesus has already healed the sick, cast out demons and brought dead people back to life, if those aren’t signs that this guy is something special, I don’t know what is? If all you needed to believe Jesus was a sign, you have them. Books of them. But it wasn’t sufficient, they needed a greater sign.

From this portrait of doubt from those who were outside of Jesus circle, we immediately see doubt from inside his circle. **Mark 8:14-21**. Now this is one of my favorite passages in all scripture because it captures the cluelessness of the disciples. Mind you, Jesus two chapters ago fed 10,000 people with 5 loaves, a few hours ago he fed 4,000 with seven loaves, and now there are 12 guys with one loaf and the disciples are panicking. Jesus gave them a cryptic warning about the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod, and the disciples pause for a minute...”But what about the bread.”

Jesus was grieved by this and says, do you not understand, do you not see! In the same way the Pharisees doubted that Jesus was authentic, here are the disciples and they are worried about food when the one who is the bread of life is sitting in their midst. It’s not about the bread! It’s about me. And the disciples missed it.

These two stories capture the how oblivious we as humans are to the person of Christ, but this next passage captures something different: **Portrait of Grace**

Mark 8:22-26. I remember someone coming up after GCF one time and asking me about this story. She asked why it was that Jesus needed to touch this man twice in order for this sight to be restored clearly. I didn’t have an answer. This is the only time in any of the gospels where Jesus’ initial miracle was not effective. We have seen him bring dead people back to life with a word, but here Jesus is struggling with the simple task of restoring sight.

Why? Because Jesus knew exactly what he was doing. In the passage before this we are confronted with the lacking awareness of the disciples. They are with Jesus, they have seen Jesus, but look back at Jesus’ words to them: **Mark 8:18**. Do you not see!?

You see Jesus did this miracle for the sake of clarity. The Christian life is not always a life of immediate change, sometimes change is slow, sometimes clarity is lacking, but change and clarity, new vision always comes from the hands of Christ. Jesus brought the blind man’s eyes increasing clarity, and he too will bring the disciples increased clarity in his own time.

Immediately after this we see what was just modeled with the blind man starting to happen to the disciples. This is the **Portrait of Increasing Clarity**.

Mark 8:27-30. I love this passage because it gets at something important. Jesus is talking with the disciples, and he asks them what other people think of him. Some say he is John the Baptist back from the dead. A sort of Gandalf the gray to Gandalf the white transformation. Some say he is the prophet Elijah, coming back from heaven to bring good news.

And often it is easy for us to shape our view of Jesus of the group think of those around us. But Jesus knew groupthink is not sufficient when it comes to himself. Your view on Jesus isn’t validated by the number of people who share the same view, your view on Jesus is validated by the truthfulness of it. Which is why Jesus asked them, “Who do you say that I am?”

This is the question we all need to answer. A question each of us in here have answered. And yet Peter, in a brief moment of clarity nails it: “You are the Christ.” Peter on the road had a different view of Jesus than

Peter on the water. God was granting him clarity, the trees were beginning to look like people. Jesus was the Christ, the anointed one, the messiah. The one we have been waiting for. Jesus was the savior.

Yet, we seem to encounter a set back almost right away: **Mark 8:31-33**. While Peter's view had been clarified, he still couldn't see clearly. He still thought that Jesus was supposed to be a different kind of Christ. That Jesus would come and defeat Rome and free the Jews. This portrait of suffering was wrong, and it would kill morale. But Jesus rebuked him. You see from this point onward in the book of Mark, Jesus is set on the cross and nothing will alter his path.

The story of this text is important, and it's really only after we have seen the whole story of Mark 8 that we can put together the real theme of this text.

There are two observations we can take away from this string of stories in Mark 8. The first is **Jesus is merciful to the slow**.

Now I want you to remember that the disciples in this story are the 12 disciples, men hand-picked by Jesus to carry out his mission. And this story is riddled with their slowness of understanding.

After feeding 10,000 people with 5 loaves, the disciples are terrified that Jesus won't be able to provide for these 4,000 people and seven loaves. Yet Jesus took them with him. After Jesus warned them of their unbelief, the disciples still failed to understand what Jesus was talking about. But Jesus didn't abandon them. After Peter rebuked Jesus for talking about his death, Jesus did not forsake him.

And in the same way the blind man received his sight slowly, over time, Jesus is merciful to those who are slow. It's easy to look at the disciples here, and laugh at their hardness of heart. If only we could have swapped positions with them, we would have believed.

But their heart is my heart. I am weak willed. I wrestle with my growth, I see the promises of God and I chose to live in sin. I see the gospel of Jesus yet so often it is hidden in the back of my life, the corner of my heart. What I need is not more knowledge, what I need is more grace. And Jesus offers us that grace abundantly.

We just returned from a very long break. Many of you went home, to old friends, old patterns, maybe old habits. Some of you may have grown towards Christ over this break, some of you may have grown away from him. If that is you, God has not forsaken you. Jesus' grace is not removed from you. Your setbacks and your slowness should be met with repentance not abandonment. Pray that Jesus would continue to be gracious to you, that he would once again touch your eyes and clarify your vision.

The second observation is really the hope of the first. How is Jesus merciful to the lost, he corrects their vision. What is it that they should see: **Jesus is a sign to the lost**.

Jesus told the Pharisees that they would receive no additional sign. This is true. If you are someone who is looking for a sign from Jesus to validate his claim as God, you will not get one.

But what the Pharisees failed to miss is that they were looking at the sign. Jesus won't give a sign. Jesus is the sign. In **Matthew 16:4** we see Matthew's account of the story.

What is the sign of Jonah? Jonah was the reluctant prophet who was swallowed by a fish for three days, but on the third day what happened? The fish spit Jonah out, and Jonah went preached salvation to Nineveh, and Nineveh was saved.

Three days, resurrection, salvation. The sign of Jesus' divinity is the cross. There is no clearer picture of who Jesus is than Jesus portrayed on the cross.

This picture is an offensive one. One where even after Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ, Peter rebukes Jesus for talking about it. You see Peter understood that Jesus was a savior, but like many of us Peter didn't understand what he was being saved from.

If Jesus was coming just to make us moral, why would he have to die? If Jesus was coming just to make us generous, why would he need to suffer? But if Jesus was coming to bear the punishment for our sins, if he was coming to deal with our death...then he had to die.

There is a rare medical condition called congenital insensitivity to pain with anhidrosis. When I first read of this disease, I thought it was awesome. What this disease does is it messes with your nerves, and doesn't allow your nerves to develop pain receptors like they normally should. You don't feel pain. How awesome is that.

About one out of every 350,000 people are born with this disease, but there are only 450 or so documented cases of it. Those numbers don't add up. How can this be? Because most people don't live past the age of 3. I thought it would be cool to live without pain, but pain is necessary to life. Pain alters us that we need to change something, to get out of harms way, to get help.

How is the Jesus a sign to the lost? He reveals to us the weight of our sin and what he did to save us. He shows us our pain. The most gracious thing Jesus can do for you is show you your need for him, and he has done that on the cross.

The cross is our proof. If you want proof of who Jesus is, if you want proof of God's faithfulness don't look to the circumstances of your life, don't look at your ease of living, look at the cross. That's the faithfulness of God. That's the love of Christ. That is our salvation.

Pray that Jesus is gracious in touching you and revealing that to you.