

The Gospel of Mark – D-Group

Content for Fall 2021

Session #6 (For October 13)
Mark 8:1-9:50



In this study, we're looking at the PORTRAIT of Jesus Mark provides through His Gospel. It's a perspective that is similar to the other writers (especially Matthew and Luke), yet with his own unique emphases. These guides are looking at the broader text/section we are covering each week with a more specific focus on key parts worth a closer look.

The Broader Section – Mark 8:1-9:50

Especially when it comes to the reflection questions in this section, these are far more for your benefit if you find it helpful to jot such things down as you're reading. What matters most here in this part is actually reading the text itself.

READ Mark 8:1-9:50

Some quick notes on this section:

Jesus feeds the 4,000 in Gentile Territory (8:1-10) ... The last two scenes of chapter 7 put Jesus in Gentile territory where He continues to carry-out His mission. This location is significant as it shows another dimension to Jesus' ministry – doing the same for Gentile outsiders as He had done for Jews. This miracle in chapter 8 makes that connection all the more obvious. It's only a crowd of 4,000+ this time; and yet, we see Jesus provide sufficient sustenance for everyone to have enough. Even from within the timeframe of Jesus' ministry, we see His heart going beyond the accepted (and even expected) ethnic boundaries.

More conflict with the Pharisees – a request for “a sign” and Jesus' warnings about them (8:11-21) ... couched in what seems to be a simple request, the Pharisees wanted something to affirm the authorization for His ministry. Undoubtedly, Jesus *could* have done yet one more miracle; and yet, who honestly believes these Jewish leaders would have accepted it as confirmation about Him? In these words (they're even harsher in Matthew's version – see 16:4), we do see Jesus' critique of a kind of “faith” that expects full evidence as validation. From there, Jesus provides a warning for His followers against such unbelief that refuses to embrace His identity.

A two-step healing of a blind man (8:22-25) ... this is an odd scene to understand. Given all Jesus has been able to do already, it's hard to believe that this two-step process was somehow necessary. One *suggested possibility* is that the movement from blindness → partial sight → full sight with this blind man becomes an enacted analogy for what will unfold in the next scenes: partial understanding of Jesus' identity and mission → further clarification and understanding.

Peter's “great confession” about Jesus' identity (8:27-30) ... the whole Gospel has been building to this clear and straightforward pronouncement about who Jesus is. All of the evidence that Mark has been using to paint this portrait of Jesus now gets put into words with this definitive declaration.

From Jesus' identity to His mission – a needed clarification about His path *and* the path of those who are His followers (8:31-9:1) ... now that there is such a definitive declaration of Jesus' identity as the Messiah, He immediately begins the process of clarifying *what kind* of Messiah He is. There were layers of great expectations about what would come through the Messiah. It was one part a militaristic conqueror – one who would come to bring liberation from enemies. It was another part a king – one of David's descendants who would reign over an eternal geo-political earthly kingdom as the greatest king of Israel once did. Even with the hints of the Messiah as one who suffers as a servant in the OT, the concept of a Messiah who would die a sacrificial death just simply wasn't a part of the 1st century Jewish mindset ... even for Jesus' disciples. And so, on three different occasions (here, 9:31 and 10:33-34), He is going to predict His death *and resurrection*. It's what happens here in this scene. In fact, it becomes an occasion not just to clarify what Jesus' path would be like, but what the path would be like for His followers as well (more on this below). 9:1 then provides this rather mysterious statement about the Kingdom's arrival in great power.

Jesus' "Transfiguration" (9:2-13) ... this is a fascinating scene revealing Jesus' radiant glory as the visible expression of God on earth (see Hebrews 1:3 and Daniel 7:13-14). Not surprisingly, it adds something big to the discussion of Jesus' identity. Some would argue that this scene is the fulfillment of the words of 9:1 while others point more to the resurrection and what happens shortly after in the book of Acts (it's hard to know for sure). Either way, this scene is significant as it continues the basic theme of clarifying Jesus' identity. Consider the journey this way. Step 1, Peter declares Jesus to be the Messiah (a high point, for sure!). Step 2, Jesus then offers a significant correction as to what exactly that means anticipating His death (a quite confusing reality for Jesus' disciples to comprehend). Step 3, lest the disciples begin to lower their perception of Jesus, this scene again clarifies His divine status (notice especially the voice in verse 7). The Pharisees had asked for a sign of authorization for what Jesus was claiming to be. They didn't get what they were looking for, but it has nonetheless become quite clear who Jesus is! For sure, it is in this scene where Jesus' glory is displayed most fully while on earth – a reminder of His true nature and identity as God's divine Son in the flesh! In that way, this scene in Matthew, Mark and Luke becomes an enacted display of what John states in 1:14 of his gospel: *"The Word became flesh ... and we have seen His glory!"*

Another demon-possessed child "healed" (9:14-29) ... it's another scene where we see an emphasis on the importance of faith. In this instance, it comes more through Jesus' exasperation at a lack of faith (see vv. 19 and 23).

Prediction #2 of Jesus' death and further teaching about what matters to Jesus (9:30-37) ... whereas the first prediction in 8:31 gave a general statement of what Jesus had begun to communicate, Mark now puts the words as coming *directly* from His mouth. He was fully aware of what was coming – both the bad *and* the good of the resurrection at the end. We do also see a level of uncertainty from Jesus' followers (see v. 32). From there, just as the first prediction led to some teaching from Jesus about what it takes to be His disciples (8:34ff), so here, He reminds them about having humility and serving others. This conversation is going to re-surface again toward the end of chapter 10 on the back end of Jesus' *third* passion prediction.

Further teaching from Jesus (9:38-50) ... the basic call to humility and the theme of "welcoming a child" from 9:37 continues in this section. Along the way, it also becomes an opportunity for Jesus to teach further about the seriousness of sin and the extreme measures we must use to deal with sin (9:43-50).

In general, what questions and/or observations do you have from reading this text as a whole?

What does this section teach us about Jesus and His identity?

APPLICATION-Centered ... what does this overall section teach us about following Jesus? For example, what are some of the instructions or commands we should live out (note if these are specific to an individual or more broadly for any follower of Jesus)? What are the Christ-like attitudes and actions this text highlights as appropriate for us to model as His followers?

Key Theme #1 – Our “Expectations” for Jesus, the Messiah

One of the themes in this section of Mark is the way Jesus runs contrary to the expectations that His 1st century followers had for Him as the Messiah. In fact, *as soon as Peter makes his declaration about Jesus’ identity*, we see this quick pivot to these clarifications that come in the form of three predictions of His passion. In the end, the emphasis is still on Jesus’ victory; it’s just that it comes *through* a path of suffering before the glory of the resurrection. It’s an important reminder for us about Jesus and our expectations for Him: defining His identity is *His* prerogative, not ours.

It’s not hard to see how this has key implications for a life of faith more broadly. Our trust and confidence in Jesus cannot be filtered through what we *want* Him to be; instead, it has to be grounded in who He is and God’s heavenly vantage point (that’s a big point of the interplay between Jesus and Peter in 8:32-33). Anytime we create an expectation for Him that goes beyond what He has established, we are not following Jesus as He is, but what we want Him to be.

What are some ways it’s tempting for you to want Jesus to live up to the expectations you have for who He’s supposed to be and what He’s supposed to do?

Here's one way it is good for us to think about this: we so often want the Good News of Jesus to include earthly results – outcomes that deliver on what we want *in the here-and-now*. In the end, that's what 1st century Messianic expectations were about. They wanted a military victory that led to here-and-now liberation and an earthly kingdom. What Jesus came to bring about was so much better ... even though it meant victory through suffering and a cross. As with then, our faith in Jesus needs to embrace Him as He is and be content with the greatness of His identity. Likewise, our faith needs to embrace His promises as being good enough as they are with what they assure for our eternal future regardless of what it means about our here-and-now path. That doesn't mean it's wrong for us to desire or pray for certainly temporal outcomes; it does mean that Jesus is who He says He is and His promise is both sure and sufficient even if our earthly expectations are not met!

Key Theme #2 – Jesus' Path to the Cross and Our Path as His Followers

We see in two instances Jesus' prediction of His death (8:31 and 9:31). On both occasions, Jesus not only talks about His own path, but implications for His followers as well. That becomes especially pronounced in 8:34ff. Just as Jesus' identity and mission included victory *through suffering*, so it would be for His followers. These words on the costly nature of discipleship are so foundational for us to consider as His followers. We are prone to think about believing in Jesus as a reality that puts us in position to receive His gracious blessings ... and it is! Yet, these words remind us that there is another side to the equation: following Him also involves a hard choice for us.

In these verses (8:34-38), what stands out about the cost it takes to follow Him (pay particular attention to the three-fold instructions in v. 34)? How have you experienced that challenging path on your faith journey?

What does it practically look like for us to live out Jesus' instructions about discipleship from His words in this text?

Just as Jesus' path would end up in victorious resurrection, the promise for His disciples is that victory awaits us at His return. ***How does this reminder motivate you when it comes to your willingness to take the hard road of discipleship?***