

Seeing Clearly Who the King Is

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Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 0 0] church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen. Please take a seat.

You might remember from last week after his running with the Pharisees, Jesus crossed over to the Gentile territory and met a Gentile woman and he told her that he'd come first for the Jews and not yet for the Gentiles. That's all of us. And it's why he sent his disciples only to Jewish towns. But then he still healed her daughter and then he went on to heal another Gentile whom Dorothy referred to, the mute and person who was also deaf. And then he also feeds 4,000 Gentiles as we heard about from the beginning of chapter 8. In other words, he still shows that although he's come first for the Jews, he was also a light for the Gentiles. He will still save Gentiles too. And we see this as the commission of his disciples where he says, go to all the nations and making disciples of them. But the reason I've included these verses today is because Jesus will refer to this feeding in a moment. And so it's good for us to be familiar with the story. It also raises our theme though of seeing who Jesus is. Because notice how long the people were with Jesus in verses 1 to 3. It says, during those days, that is during those days he was in the Gentile region of Decapolis, another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, I have compassion for these people. They have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way because some of them have come a long distance. Now presumably Jesus was teaching them because that's what he always did. Just as he taught the 5,000 that he fed earlier on. Now notice, how long have they been listening for Jesus? How long? Three days. Now that's a pretty long sermon, isn't it? And so I've got every right now. You just settle down.

I'm going to, no, I'm joking. They've been with Jesus for three days. Why would they have stayed that long? Surely they saw something in Jesus, that he wasn't an ordinary person to have listened to him for three days. Of course, it's not long before we meet the Pharisees who don't see Jesus clearly at all. And so let's pick it up at verse 10 and point one area outlines. Verse 10, Jesus got in the boat with his disciples after the feeding and went to the region of Da Manutha. The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven. He sighed deeply and said, why does this generation ask for a miraculous sign? I tell you the truth, no sign will be given to it. After crossing back to the Jewish side of the lake now, Jesus meets some Pharisees who don't see Jesus clearly.

Instead, they see Jesus as one who's from the devil on the dark side of the force, so to speak. But that's exactly what they accuse him of back in chapter three. And so they test him. That is, they ask for a miraculous sign, some proof, a test to show that he's from God rather than from the devil. But of course, Jesus has already given them plenty of miraculous signs, hasn't he? He'd healed the paralytic back in chapter two in front of the Pharisees.

He'd cast out demons, which no one on the dark side would do. Not to mention all the other healings that these Pharisees would have heard about if not seen themselves. And so ironically, their request for a sign is actually a sign in itself. That is, their request is a sign that they don't believe in Jesus. It's a sign that they don't see Jesus clearly. And we see this in the world today, don't we? I've heard people say, well, if God just gives me a sign, if God just shows me a sign, then I'll believe in him. I don't know if you've ever heard people say that. I've heard people say that. But you see, God has given us a sign. It's here.

[4 : 05] It's the Bible. I know it's not very flash. It's not as flashy as some big miracle. But here we have historical accounts, bedded in history. There is evidence for it to back it up. He's given us everything we need to believe, in other words. Of course, for some people, like the Pharisees, this will still not be good enough. There has to be more. And in the end, there will never be enough for these people because the real issue is their hard heart.

So despite whatever evidence they have, they simply won't believe. And so Jesus warns the disciples about this hardened unbelief in him. Have a look at verse number 13.

Then he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side. The disciples had forgotten to bring bread except for one loaf they had with them in the boat. Jesus said, be careful, he warned them. Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod.

Jesus says here that the hardened unbelief of the Pharisees and Herod, it can spread like yeast spreads through a loaf of bread. And people can be persuaded to harden their hearts, even more so against Jesus. And this warning is particularly applicable here for these disciples. Since they are having trouble, I'm having trouble speaking, yep, since they are having trouble seeing who Jesus is clearly. And so they misunderstand what Jesus is talking about. Have a look at verse number 16.

They discuss with each other and one another and said, it is because we have no bread that Jesus is saying this. Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them, why are you talking about having no bread?

[5 : 49] 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? And don't you remember when I broke the five loaves for the 5,000, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up? Twelve, they replied. And when I broke the seven loaves for the 4,000, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up? They answered, seven. He said to them, do you still not understand? Now I must admit when I first read this part I felt a little bit like the disciples because I didn't quite understand what Jesus was talking about and the link here. But what Jesus is saying is, don't you see who I am? You guys are worried about bread but didn't I just feed 5,000 people with five loaves of bread? And didn't I just feed 4,000 people with seven loaves of bread?

So don't you think I could feed just 12 of you people with one loaf? Don't you think I could do that? Don't you see who I am? Don't be like those Pharisees, Jesus is saying, who have hardened their hearts against me. Rather believe that I am the Christ, the King who can provide for you and give you life. You see the disciples understand that Jesus is different, they do, they see that.

But it hasn't quite clicked just who Jesus is yet. And when I was at high school I enjoyed mathematics, call me crazy, that's fine, and things like algebra. Though at first I must confess it didn't quite make sense to me. And then my father who was a maths teacher helped me and then it just clicked. And I'm sure you've had experiences of learning things like that. And I wonder if it's similar to the disciples here, they don't quite get who Jesus is just yet. But it will click for them in a moment with Jesus's help. And I think this is the point the next episode makes. Have a look over the page to verse number 22 to 26. Here they come to Bethsaida and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village.

When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, do you see anything? He looked up and said, I see people, they look like trees walking around. Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes, then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.

Jesus sent him home saying, don't go into the village. Okay, so here's the scene. They're out of the boat now, back on Gentile side of the lake and at a village of Bethsaida. And Jesus heals this man, a Gentile, in a rather unusual way. At first, instead of just saying the word, as he's done many times before, he uses spit and places his hands on his eyes. Now, it may seem rather unpleasant to us, but spit in the ancient world was seen as something that had healing properties. In fact, even when I was growing up, if I scratched my arm, my dad would say, just rub some spit on it.

[8 : 47] And that's what he thought as well. In any case, Jesus seems to let this blind man know in a concrete way, you know, by putting spit on his eyes and his hands, he couldn't see, remember? He seems to let him know in a concrete way what he was doing, and that it was Jesus who would heal him.

It's Jesus' hands, Jesus' spirit, it's Jesus who will heal him. But the other unusual thing is that it kind of takes two attempts for Jesus to heal the man, doesn't it? Now, has Jesus lost his touch?

Is this miracle too hard for him? And he has to have two goes at it? Well, the answer is, of course not. In a couple of chapters' time, he's going to heal another blind man by simply saying the word. So it can't be that he's lost his touch. So why heal in two stages? Well, I think it's because this healing is a picture of the disciples. You see, at the moment, the disciples don't quite see Jesus clearly. They are like the man after round one of healing, whose vision is a bit fuzzy still. That's their vision of Jesus, a bit fuzzy. But in a moment, they will be like the man after round two of healing. They will see Jesus clearly for who he is. And I wonder if Mark has placed this event here as a transition between the disciples who don't quite see and understand who Jesus is, to when they do clearly see in a moment where Peter confesses him as the Christ. And in so doing, I wonder if Mark is implying that the disciples' sudden clarity in Jesus is not their own doing, but someone else's. It's Jesus' doing. You see, just as Jesus is the one who opens the eyes of the physically blind, it's also Jesus who opens the eyes of the spiritually blind. And I wonder if Mark is subtly saying that here by his placement of this account. Either way, the disciples now see clearly. See verse 27? 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? And Peter answered, you are the Christ. And Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

You see, here Jesus pushes the disciples to make a decision about who he is. And Peter answers on behalf of the 12 and he says, you are the Christ, God's chosen king. You see, with Jesus' help, they finally see clearly who Jesus is. They finally see that Jesus is God's promised king, who would bring in God's kingdom and establish peace and prosperity for his people.

[11 : 25] This is what the Jews had been waiting for. And it's a turning point in Mark's book about Jesus. Up to this point, the question has primarily been, who is Jesus? And from now on, it will primarily be, what does it mean for Jesus to be the king? And that brings us to point to verse 31.

Verse 31, he then began to teach them about the son of, that the son of man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed.

And after three days, rise again. He spoke plainly about this and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. Jesus says, being the king means he must suffer and he must die. Now, this is certainly not how the disciples would have seen it. In fact, Peter even rebukes him. He kind of says, Jesus, can you just come over here for a moment? Just come here and just, I just want to talk to you for a moment. We're finally seeing that you are the chosen king and now you're saying you're going to die?

What are you talking about? You're crazy. Now, if we were in Peter's shoes, I suspect we would have done something similar. You see, this is the long awaited king on whom all of Israel had pinned their hopes. And now he says he must die?

I mean, it's not even a normal thing for any leader who's just been declared the leader or the king to say, let alone God's awaited king. Tomorrow we may get a new prime minister. We may. Who knows?

[12 : 58] Now, you know, whether it's Julia Gillard or Kevin Rudd, one of them is going to be declared the leader of Australia. And can you imagine then the first thing out of their mouths after being declared the prime minister of Australia saying, I must die? It's not normal, is it? Even for them, who certainly aren't God's long awaited king. What's more, Peter, along with the other Jews, thought that God's king would come and go to war against the Romans, would kick them out. That's why Jesus told them back in verse number 30, don't tell anyone about him. Otherwise, the Jews will try and make him into a warrior king and start a revolution against the Romans. In fact, some Jews had already tried to do that back in John chapter 6. But Jesus is not that type of king. No, no, he's the type of king that must suffer and must die. Why? Well, because God has planned it.

It must happen because God has ordained it, planned it, wrote about it in places like Isaiah 53. We heard about that in our first reading, that it was God's will to crush him, God's plan.

It must happen because God has planned it. But it must also happen because it's how God will save us. As we heard again from Isaiah 53, he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that was upon him brought us peace. And by his wounds, we have been healed.

In fact, the word rejected here is the same word that is almost always used to describe God's rejection of Israel. And so there's a hint here that Jesus is not only to be rejected by the elders and chief priests, but in some way rejected by God as well, so that we don't have to be. You see, in the end, Jesus must die if we are to live. And so Jesus rebukes Peter back. Verse number 33, he says, but when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. Get behind me, Satan, he said.

You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of man or men. Jesus rebukes Peter, who doesn't see what it means for Jesus to be the king. Now, it may seem like a rather harsh rebuke here, but you see, you cannot recognize Jesus as king on the one hand and then suddenly tell him what to do on the other, as though you are the king. No, no, if Jesus is the king, then he must decide what to do.

[15 : 16] What's more, Peter, without realizing it, was doing what Satan had already done to Jesus, tempting him, tempting him to ignore God's plan and take the easy way. I mean, Jesus could have accepted Peter and the Jews' desire to make him into a warrior king, and he could have bypassed the cross. And I suspect that would have been tempting for Jesus. I mean, he didn't like pain any more than we do. But that was not God's plan. This was man's plan. And so Jesus must follow God, not man, which means he must suffer and he must die. And three days later, rise again, for this is how he will save many. Well, if this is what it means for Jesus to be the king, then it will be no different for us who follow this king, which brings us to point three, verse 34. Verse 34, then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said, if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. Now, again, no doubt this is not what the disciples were expecting to hear from Jesus. I'm guessing they were hoping that once he set up his kingdom on earth and kicked out the Romans, that they would get VIP passes to all the best banquets, you know, backstage passes to the choirs of angels singing, treated like royalty. I mean, after all, they were the king's closest friends. In fact, later on, two disciples will actually ask Jesus if they can sit either side of his throne in his kingdom. That's what they were thinking. But Jesus says, no, no, following means that you too must die. That's what it means to take up your cross. If you lived in that time period and you saw someone taking up their cross with a little band of Roman soldiers behind them, you knew what was going to happen. You knew they're about to die. Taking up your cross is a symbol of dying. Of course, unlike Jesus, we don't die for the sins of the world. Rather, we die as the king of our own lives and instead live for Jesus as the true king. That's what Jesus means when he says we're to deny ourselves. We're to deny living for ourselves as though we are the king. Instead, we are to live for Jesus, the true king, and his gospel. And it's by accepting Jesus as our king and handing over our life to him that we are saved. See verse 35 again? Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, hand it over to Jesus. And whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. Now, denying ourselves doesn't mean we have to deny ourselves of all the good things in life. You know, we don't have to deny ourselves of eating chocolate or whatever it is like that.

Rather, it's about denying ourselves when we want to do something that is different to what Jesus wants. It's seeking to please Jesus above all others, including ourselves. So for example, it means forgiving someone who slighted us when we'd prefer to complain about them or gossip about them. It means making the effort to come to church when we'd rather stay home because it's more comfortable or cooler. So well done, by the way, for coming. It means reading our Bibles when we prefer to watch TV. It means being patient with others when we prefer to snap. It means standing up as a Christian when we prefer to keep quiet. It's about doing what Jesus wants as the king of our lives, you see. I was at a party one Saturday night in my teenage years. I think it was the 18th party when a guy from our church, Steve was his name, he said, oh look, I've got to go home early.

And for an 18-year-old to say that, that's not normal. And so why do you have to go home early? This is one of your good mates. This is the 18th birthday. And he said, I've got to go home early because I'm teaching Sunday school in the morning and I want to be fresh and alert so I can teach the kids well. See, here is a guy who denied himself for the sake of Jesus and the gospel. This is what it means to follow the king. I don't know what it means for you in your life at the moment. Maybe you're doing pretty well. In fact, I'm encouraged by many people here who I see denying themselves and living for Jesus in various ways, serving the church and so on. For me, it's denying my desire to kick the kids into bed as soon as possible so I can relax and skip the Bible reading part.

They know I need to deny my desire and teach my children about Jesus. Whatever it is for you, if Jesus is our king, then following him means denying ourselves and living for him.

I mean, the alternative is not great. Verse 36, what good is it for a man to gain the whole world yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man gain in exchange for his soul? Jesus is saying, even if we gain everything in life in this world, yet don't live for Jesus, it's not going to save us on the last day. Whatever we gain in this life is not going to save our souls. A couple of years ago, a businessman in Ireland worth 500 million pounds, that's over a billion dollars, right? A billion dollars was found dead at age 42. January 09 it was. Now you could say he gained a fair chunk of the world. I mean 500 million pounds, that's a fair chunk of the world. But unless he knew Jesus, it won't do him any good on judgment day, will it? Unless he trusted in Jesus, he will lose or forfeit his soul. He'll lose it to hell. But if Jesus is our king, then we are saved now and will be saved on judgment day. We're safe. Though Jesus does warn in the meantime, we're not to be ashamed of him.

[20 : 40] See verse number 38? 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 and with his holy angels.

Now that's a pretty harsh warning, isn't it? If you're ashamed of me in this life, I'm going to be ashamed of you in the next. But when you think about it, it's only fair. It's only what we deserve if we are ashamed of the one who died for us. I can remember first year university, I met up with a Christian guy, Jeff. We met in a crowded cafe area. It was uni lunchtime, so there was people everywhere. And without lowering his voice, he said, so how are you finding following Jesus in this environment? And I kind of flinched, looked around to see if anyone heard. And at that point, I realized that I was actually ashamed of Jesus. And so then and there, I determined that we pray together in public. And I can't remember what he prayed. I remember what I prayed. I beg God for forgiveness for being ashamed of him. And the great news, of course, is that he will forgive us. But our natural tendency is often to try and fit in, isn't it? But if the topic of Jesus or God comes up, we're not to shy away from it. We're to be gentle and wise. You know, I'm not Bible bash people. We're not to do that.

But we must never, never be ashamed. I mean, which would you prefer? A small crowd of mocking people now? Or Jesus in all his glory with a thousand angels being ashamed of you then and turning his back on you? Actually, that's like choosing between two bad things, you know, shame now or shame later. Rather, what we're to remember is that Jesus was rejected. He suffered. He died for you and me. And so how on earth could we possibly be ashamed of one who's done that for us?

Now, if you see what it means to follow Jesus, you may be thinking, this is a big call. It's a big call. And it is. But Jesus ends his conversation with a reminder that it will be worth it, that we're on the right side. Have a look at chapter 9, verse 1, the last verse of our passage today.

Jesus said to them, I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power. He says, just so you know that this will be worth it, just so you know that you're following the right king, just so you know that, you know, you're part of the right kingdom, I'm going to show some of you a glimpse of its power. And he does. But you'll have to wait until next week to see it. So come back next week. But for now, realize that Jesus is the real deal. He is the one who can save us, who can bring us safely home to heaven. And so following him will be worth it. I started this morning with a bit of a story of the advert about an embarrassing moment where you don't see clearly. But more important is seeing clearly who Jesus is and what it means to follow him. Because if we don't see Jesus clearly, if we don't believe in him, then how much worse will it be for us on that final day? Much worse than being embarrassed. So let me ask you, do you, who do you say Jesus is? How do you see him? Do you see him as just a prophet, you know, a good teacher who teaches good morals? Or, you know, nothing much more than a historical figure?

[24 : 02] Or is he your loving king who died for you, your saviour, your everything? And if he is, then we are to keep taking up our cross, denying ourselves and living for him. We are to give him our lives because he gave us his. Let's pray that God would help us do that.

Our Heavenly Father, as the Apostle Paul wrote, help us, we pray, to no longer live for ourselves, but for Jesus who died for us and was raised again. We ask it in his name and for your glory. Amen.

We're going to sing now a song which picks up some of these themes in this life.