

Who Do You Say that I am?

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[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 11th of March 2001.

The preacher is Paul Barker. His sermon is entitled, Who Do You Say I Am? and is from Mark chapters 5 to 8.

We're continuing a sermon series on Mark's Gospel. And we're covering the whole Gospel in four weeks. And this is the second of four, so we're dealing with chapters 5 to 8.

Well, at least halfway through chapter 8. And I'll refer to the map in a few minutes. We might just put that off for a minute. Sorry, David, I did say put it on for all of it, but we'll come to it in a minute, I think.

Let me pray that God will help us to understand what we're looking at tonight. God, we thank you that you have written for us the words of Scripture, inspired them for our correction and rebuke, as well as our training in righteousness.

[1 : 11] We thank you that in them we find us sufficient to make us wise for salvation by faith in Christ. And we pray tonight that as we look somewhat quickly through these chapters in the middle of Mark's Gospel, that you indeed will make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ.

We pray for his sake. Amen. Who do people say that Jesus is? There are more books written about Jesus than about any other person in world history.

And they still come out at a phenomenal rate. I get quite a number of book catalogues, theological book catalogues, and almost without fail, I would say, each new catalogue has at least one, if not several, new books about Jesus.

It's an extraordinary business, writing books about Jesus. And they keep on coming, and they all seem to have their particular slant or angle about who do people say or who is Jesus Christ.

For some, it is Jesus the Jew, a Jewish man, a particular Jewish man, of course, but that's the real angle. And there are several very famous and well-known and scholarly and erudite and much referred to books really saying that Jesus is really a Jew.

[2 : 30] Well, he is, but that's the sum total of it for some of them. For some, it's Jesus the revolutionary, the one who's going to overthrow the kingdoms and so on. For some, it's Jesus the rabbi, the wise person or the teacher.

For some, it's Jesus the healer, a person who could do miracles and heal people quite surprisingly. For some, it's Jesus the prophet, the one who can predict the future or the one who claims to speak God's words.

For some, it's Jesus the deluded maniac, a poor person who somehow seemed to attract a bit of a crowd, got carried away with his ego and the crowd got bigger and he became self-deluded.

For some, it's Jesus the monk type figure, an ascetic, that is somebody who doesn't have the luxuries of life, lives a fairly simple life, not necessarily poor, but very basic and frugal.

Linked to that view is that Jesus was an Essene, which was a particular group of ascetic Jews who, by and large, lived in different places, but especially where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found and presumably written, some claim that Jesus was associated with those Essenes.

[3 : 40] Or there's Jesus the guru, the cult figure, the one who attracted simpletons to follow him to the ends of the earth and in the end lose their lives for him, a sort of primitive version of David Koresh or Jim Jones.

Or there's those who really think Jesus is a sort of magician, maybe not rabbits out of a hat, but odd and bizarre miracles, not just the nice things, the healings, which we can wonder and marvel at, but the sort of odd things like turning water into wine and feeding a great number of people with just a few tricks of loaves and fishes.

Who do you say that Jesus is? It's so hard to categorise him. That's part of the problem. There is some truth in many of those views.

Jesus was a Jewish person to an extent. He was a prophet. He was a healer to an extent. He was certainly a teacher. He had some sort of political views, no doubt, etc. But all of those views are insufficient in the end.

Jesus is bigger than those categories. And for many of us, Jesus is bigger than the categories that we try and box him into. And he was certainly bigger than the categories that the Jews and the Gentiles of the first century AD tried to put him into as well.

[5 : 03] I remember going after 17 years back to the old primary school I used to be at. I'd spent three years in primary school in England. And for the first time, went back to England 17 years later.

So I made a little pilgrimage to my old primary school. Now the highlight, I have to say this, the highlight of my whole school life, primary and secondary school, was a performance of Oliver when I was in year five.

And I was the artful dodger. I was the greatest actor and singer you've ever seen. And we performed, I think, for two nights in the school hall, which was a huge auditorium, seating thousands upon thousands of people.

And there I was the artful dodger in this wonderful performance of Oliver. And when I went back to the town where I spent those three years, I actually caught up with Oliver and Fagan, as it happened.

And they themselves admitted that that was part of the highlight of their school life. And I also caught up with one of the mothers of my very first girlfriend, who was involved in making all the uniforms and costumes, I should say, for the whole cast.

[6 : 10] And she too thought that that was one of the highlights of her daughter Sarah's school life. Then I went to the school hall. It was tiny.

This huge auditorium over 17 years seemed to have shrunk. And the thousands of people who'd applauded and stampeded my performance as the artful dodger, where would they have all fitted? Into this rather small school hall that would certainly be no bigger and probably smaller than our big hall over here. It was much smaller than I expected.

Very disappointing. Shattering my ego, let me say. But sometimes we see things and they're much bigger than we expect. They sort of burst the categories of our expectation.

I remember just two to three years ago going to Pompeii near Naples and expecting some fine ruins and just being dumbstruck by the extent and size of these ruins extending for what seemed to be almost kilometres and finding there that this was far bigger than my expectations.

[7 : 21] And no doubt for you, there are times in your life when you've expected something and it has turned out to be far bigger than you've ever expected. Well, so too with Jesus.

When he came, people's expectations were not sort of shrunk and diminished, but they were blown out. But this man did not fit their categories. You know when you've got a really big and odd-shaped Christmas present to wrap and you're trying to disguise it?

It's almost impossible, isn't it? Well, Jesus is that sort of person that you cannot quite box into a category because he's so big and there's so many aspects to him that really he defies being boxed up into a category.

Now that's in a sense what we see when we read these Gospels. Let's put the slide up now of a map because I think it's helpful to get a feel for the to's and fro's of Jesus' ministry in these chapters.

He's been in the top... Let me just orient you a little bit. Right down the bottom is the Sea of Galilee, the little sort of tear-shaped blob. And most of Jesus' ministry in these chapters is right around that Sea of Galilee.

[8 : 33] So we're really concentrating in the bottom of that map. And he begins this section on around Capernaum, top left of the little Sea of Galilee. But he sets off then at the beginning of Mark chapter 5, which is where we're picking up the account, because he comes there, we're told, to the other side of the sea.

And that means somewhere between where I've got, well, in this case, Gerasenes, but somewhere north and south of the Gerasenes, on the right-hand side of the Sea of Galilee.

One of the significant things about this is that this is by and large, not exclusively, but by and large a Gentile area that is non-Jewish. And it seems that in Jesus' day there were areas and towns that

were Jewish or non-Jewish.

Sometimes they're actually scattered amongst each other, sometimes whole areas were largely one or the other. So Jesus has now come across to a largely Gentile area.

And it's part of what's called the Decapolis. I've written that word down the bottom right-hand corner. They were sort of like Greek city-states. They were pagan states and they were ten cities, hence Dec and the Polis's city.

[9 : 43] They went from Damascus, which is up off the top right of that whole map, capital of Syria still today, Amman was one of them, capital of Jordan today. And all of them were on this right-hand side of the map, apart from one which would have been just across the left-hand side of the Jordan River, which is the line to the bottom, a bit under the map, a place called Beit Sharnel-Savopoulos.

These, as I say, were largely Gentile areas. And that's where Jesus has come here. And when he gets there in chapter 5, he takes the initiative to cast out an evil spirit, indeed a legion of evil spirits, from a person who is possessed, a poor man who is possessed and demented by all these evil spirits that are possessing him and inhabiting him.

Notice that Jesus takes the initiative here. By and large, when somebody is sick, they beg him for healing and in response and out of compassion, he heals.

He doesn't take the initiative to heal people, by and large. But with an evil spirit, he takes the initiative. And just as he done, and we saw last week, he did, he cast out evil spirits in Capernaum on the Jewish side, now he does the same thing on the Gentile side of the Sea of Galilee.

Ironically, these demons, like the first lot in Capernaum, acknowledge who Jesus is. We know who you are. And it's ironic because they're the ones who know who he is.

[11 : 09] The disciples don't say that at first. The Jewish elders and officials and scribes and Pharisees, they can't work out who Jesus is. The people, by and large, can't work out who Jesus is, even though they follow him.

So who is Jesus? The words come in unusual places in this gospel. And they come firstly from demons and evil spirits. Well, Jesus cast them out.

He cast them into pigs, which of course are very unclean for Jews. And the pigs go flying off into the river. Well, not flying, because pigs don't fly. But they run off into the Sea of Galilee and they drown. It's a slightly bizarre incident. But we've got to remember that what evil spirits are on about is in the end death and destruction. So the pigs get sent in effect by the evil spirits into the water and drown. That's the object of evil spirits. Now, there's a lot of puzzling things about this. But I want to pick up one verse at the end of this story of the healing of exorcism of all these evil spirits. Jesus said to the man, go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and what mercy he has shown you.

[12 : 19] That's verse 19. Jesus has called himself the Lord there to that man. Go and tell your friends how much the Lord has done for you.

That's how much Jesus has done for him. And the statement, the Lord, is an allusion to God. Because God in the Old Testament is by and large called the Lord.

So Jesus here is alluding to the fact that he's not just a prophet or a magician or a healer or an exorcist or whatever. He's actually divine. And also, he showed the man mercy.

The man didn't deserve it. Though maybe he didn't deserve the evil spirits either. But he showed him mercy. He's allowed him a fresh start. And that in the end is what Jesus is on about.

But the other thing that's significant here picks up on some of the things we saw last week as well. Jesus is on about the kingdom of God which is near. And the kingdom of God demands the overthrow of the enemy of God, Satan, and evil spirits under Satan.

[13 : 23] So that's why Jesus takes the initiative in casting out evil spirits and demons. He's come to overthrow Satan and he's demonstrating what he's come to do. But of course, the real overthrow of Satan and evil comes when death is defeated in the climax of this gospel.

Well, the next story or next incident from verse 21 onwards, Jesus has now gone back to the other side of the lake again. So he's gone from the right-hand side where the Gerasenes are back into somewhere like Capernaum or thereabouts into Jewish territory again.

Here we find a leader of the synagogue. And this leader of the synagogue by name Jairus has a daughter who is at the point of death. She's about to die.

She's some distance away. We're not quite sure how far. It doesn't really matter. And he pleads for Jesus to heal her. Jesus doesn't take the initiative to heal her but he sets off with the man to do so.

Now before he gets there, another incident occurs. This is now a woman in verse 25 onwards who has a continual bleeding problem, a permanent period or something like that probably.

[14:35] and she in the crowd that is following Jesus touches his cloak. Nobody probably saw that in the jostling going on down the track. But Jesus knew something had happened.

She presumably thought she could just touch his cloak and be healed. Maybe a mixture of faith and superstition. Maybe thought she could do it anonymously. But Jesus knows and he turns and he calls for her to identify herself.

I don't think necessarily because he didn't know who she was. I'm sure that Jesus' knowledge would have enabled him to identify her. But wanting her to identify herself to him and the crowd. And when she does, he says to her in verse 34, daughter, fairly tender expression, a very compassionate expression, your faith has made you well, go in peace and be healed of your disease.

Now he's saying there, this is not superstitious magic. It's not because you touched my cloak that you've been healed. Your faith in me has enabled this healing to happen.

[15:46] Jesus is actually directing attention to himself and his proclaiming of her healing rather than to a magic act. There's a little bit more that's being said there as well because when Jesus says your faith has made you well, the word for made you well is the word to save.

Your faith has saved you. And I think Jesus here and in other places too deliberately uses that word to point to something even bigger than physical healing.

Physical healing is not what Jesus is totally on about though it's part of the kingdom. but he's actually pointing to a greater salvation that is not just a physical healing but is a total healing in a sense of body, mind and soul as well.

Well back to the leader of the synagogue and his sick daughter who by now has died. Somebody's come to tell him, they tell him that she's died, why bother Jesus any further? And then Jesus says that she's not actually dead.

He takes the man and some of his disciples, not all of them, and goes and in private in their house brings this girl back to life again and they're amazed.

[17:00] It's a fairly private healing. This is verses 40 to 42 right at the end of chapter 5. He says to her Talitha kum which means little girl get up. Again, a very tender and compassionate expression and immediately the girl got up and began to walk about.

Just as we saw last week when Jesus' healings or acts brought about immediate effect whereas if it had been a natural recovery it would have been long-term gradual recovery from fever or whatever. Here it's immediate and at this they were overcome with amazement. Just as we saw last week on several occasions when people were astonished or amazed at his healing, at his speech, at his teaching and so on so too here.

And then the puzzle. The very last verse of chapter 5 Jesus says he orders them in fact that no one should know this and told them to give her something to eat.

Now the extraordinary thing is why did Jesus tell them not to tell anyone? I mean there's a great commotion outside the house when he gets there everybody knows she's dead. Messengers have come from the house to Jesus on the road and told him and the father publicly the girl is dead.

[18:12] Everybody knows it. So when she gets up and walks around and goes outside and people see she's alive everybody will know it. So why does Jesus say to them don't tell anyone?

Well it's a bit of a puzzle. I suspect when by and large Jesus tells people not to say things to other people it is because he's trying to dampen down wrong expectations.

People think here is a great healer somebody who even raises people from the dead. Wow! Jesus is on about more than that. These are signs pointing to something greater in the end.

He's not wanting them to beef up their expectations wrongly but also I think especially in Jewish territory though not exclusively so he's trying to dampen down the danger that will inevitably come because of the crowds flocking to see healings and miracles.

We saw bits of that last week where there the Jewish authorities were already plotting to destroy him back in chapter 3. We'll see more of it in these chapters today. Jesus I think is trying to forestall that opposition that will lead to his death inevitable though that is.

[19:27] What we find in Mark's gospel is sort of a cycle of miracles and then with notes of rejection of Jesus. Again last week we saw some of that there's more of it tonight because in chapter 6 first paragraph 6 verses 1 to 6 Jesus actually comes now to his hometown Nazareth

which is roughly where that dot is there it's probably actually a bit further south where I've written on the left hand side of the map and that's where he grew up as a boy it's not where as an adult he spends most of his time though he does go there from time to time.

He comes to Nazareth then the local hero return the boy done good has come back to his hometown where presumably his mother and father Mary and Joseph still live certainly they're well known there as are Jesus other brothers and family Jesus of course was the eldest because of course Mary was a virgin at the time of Jesus' conception but after Jesus' birth the implication is that Mary and Joseph having got married had other children James Joseph Judas and Simon and are not his sisters here with us so it's quite a large family of which Jesus was the eldest it's a local family nothing special about them he was a carpenter maybe a stonemason something like that somebody who'd build work with their hands we know that in the time of Jesus certainly there was substantial building works being done not quite in Nazareth but just up the road in a place called Sephoris a city that was being built by Herod Antipas at the time where there are some fantastic ruins today to go and see these people in

Nazareth are astounded by his teaching but it confuses them he's a local boy he just went to the local school he's a carpenter he's not particularly eloquent he shouldn't be an astounding teacher we know who his family are we know who his brothers and sisters are it doesn't quite ring true and we're told that they took offence about him because of all his teaching that's at the end of verse 3 Jesus in response to them taking offence at him is amazed at their unbelief and we're also told here that he could do no deed of power there except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them now that's a puzzling statement what does it exactly mean does it mean that because of their unbelief Jesus was limited and restricted and unable to perform a miracle if that is the case then in the end I think it says that

Jesus is not divine because he's actually limited by people's response and never in the Bible do you get that sense of God probably what the sense of this statement he could do no deed of power there is more about Jesus choosing not to do a deed of power there along the lines of what he says in Matthew's gospel don't throw pearl before swine that is in the midst of all this hometown unbelief Jesus chooses not to do any deed of power there apart from just a few exceptions and there may be reasons for those because what's the point he's faced with clear and blunt unbelief and so he chooses to do no more miracles there the rejection of Jesus which keeps recurring in this gospel from early days on in one sense gets sadder as you go through here it's very sad his own home folk and it seems also probably members of his family because we know that they were unbelievers at a later stage reject him and so he chooses not to do anything there in the face of their rejection and unbelief well the next incident is Jesus now sending out his disciples it's their turn they've seen him teach and preach and heal and cast out demons now it's their turn and he passes on to them his authority to do those things they don't have the authority inherent in themselves like Jesus does but rather it's a derived authority from Jesus authority he's called them as we saw last week to be fishers of men or to be fishers of people and now he's giving them opportunity to do this we have to be careful with this little paragraph too sometimes people say well here is a model of mission and at one level it does in a sense provide us with a prototype of future mission that after the resurrection Jesus disciples and apostles are sent out to the ends of the earth to proclaim the gospel but this is a limited mission they're to go in twos they're not to take things with them they're to wipe the dust off their feet if they're if they face any rejection it's not a model for Christian mission generally we shouldn't say from this that oh well Christian missionaries shouldn't take anything with them and only wear sandals and and so on this was a very limited mission it was a sort of prototype of what would happen later a foretaste if you like of the real event later on certainly the fame of [24 : 49] Jesus has been spreading we can't fail to escape that in Mark's gospel because there are crowds all over the place when Jesus is healing and teaching and we saw last week the crowd around one house led to four men cracking open a hole in the roof to lower their sick friend in so it shouldn't surprise us then to find that the fame of Jesus has even come to the ears of Herod Antipas who is the person in charge of what's called the Galilee which is all the area to the left hand side basically of the Sea of Galilee over to the Mediterranean Sea let me just briefly explain for those who like a little bit of history Herod the Great was a very powerful man and he died just after Jesus was born he's the Herod who tried to kill the babies in Bethlehem after he died his kingdom was divided by and large into three Herod Antipas one of his sons had this area of Galilee another son who was even worse Herod

Archelaus had the area of Judea down where Jerusalem is he was so bad that even the Romans got rid of him and that's why you end up with a Roman governor who at the time of Jesus death was Pontius Pilate the third area was the area of Galonitis off to the right and the top there and that was ruled by another son of Herod called Philip a much nicer more humanitarian person and when Jesus goes into that sort of territory he's in much safer territory and he doesn't seem to worry so much about people talking about him and he doesn't seem to be trying to dampen down their words there Herod Antipas is the one who appears later on at Jesus trial as well and becomes friends with Pontius Pilate at that point well even Herod Antipas has heard about Jesus we're told in verse 14 of chapter 6 some were saying John the baptizer has been raised from the dead and for this reason these powers are at work in him but others said it's Elijah and others said it's a prophet like one of the prophets of old but when Herod heard of it he said John that's

John the baptist whom I beheaded has been raised now the next paragraph goes on to tell us about how John the baptist came to be beheaded it's a flashback if you like because we the reader didn't know that he'd been beheaded to this point but the issue for us is not about John the baptist being beheaded but is the question who is Jesus we've now got a sample of views there are some who think he's a great prophet like Jeremiah Isaiah or Ezekiel some who think that he's Elijah one of the greatest of the Old Testament prophets and especially because in the Old Testament there was the expectation that Elijah would return and some say as Herod said it is John the baptist whom I beheaded now the point of interest for us here is not just who do people say that Jesus is here's a variety of views Herod thinks Jesus is John the baptist again what did Herod do to John the baptist he killed him by implication then Jesus life is in danger here not only from the

Pharisees who are plotting to destroy him back in chapter 3 but now also from Herod who if he thinks Jesus is John the baptist raised surely is going to try and do away with him as he did John the baptist earlier on what it's saying to us then is the question who is Jesus is really a life and death question depending on how you answer it you may even want to put Jesus to death but of course ironically it's also a life and death question because who we think Jesus is will actually influence whether we receive in the end eternal life or eternal death now John the baptist was beheaded at a feast that Herod Antipas had and that's in contrast to the next paragraph verse 30 onwards with another feast a very different feast this time much more well known the feeding of the 5,000 this it seems happens back across the right-hand side of the lake probably there's a bit of dispute about this and today if you go to the sea of Galilee they'll direct you to a place on the left-hand side of the lake but by and large probably it's happens on the right-hand side but it can't be absolutely certain and there we find that there is a great crowd 5,000 men that it doesn't include the women and the children in the counting of that and so they have and they're hungry and Jesus takes compassion on them the story is well known it's the only miracle that's recorded in all four of the Gospels apart from the miracle of the resurrection he's probably out of Herod Antipas's territory at this point and by and large from now on keeps clear of that territory publicly at least although he does cross in and out of it a few times when Jesus feeds the 5,000 it is a miracle people hadn't brought a picnic lunch like some people try and suggest it's not the people said oh look I'm not hungry thank you I don't want to eat they were hungry and they ate and they were satisfied and there is more left over than there was to start with we shouldn't worry too much about the symbolism of all the numbers of fish and things like that I think it's just how many there were not many for a huge crowd but the point of it is to direct attention to

Jesus not how did he do his miracle but who he is there are glimpses here of words that take us back to the Old Testament it's in a wilderness place literally and that reminds us of Israel in the wilderness and in the wilderness Israel was miraculously fed with food from heaven manna from heaven some special substance that God provided each day except the Sabbath day through their wilderness wanderings for nearly 40 years and Jesus when he sees the crowd says these are sheep without a shepherd which is also an expression that comes from the wilderness time from the book of numbers what I think then this feeding of the 5,000 is alluding to is that Jesus provides what in the Old Testament God provided even greater than Moses is Jesus Christ there is an abundant feeding that points to a divine hand but more than that it anticipates the divine banquet of heaven this is a sign of the kingdom the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of

[31 : 33] God where there will be an abundant feast at the marriage feast of the lamb we see that in the last chapters of the Bible and Jesus here is pointing to himself as he's already done in this gospel by calling himself the bridegroom and he's anticipating that abundant feast of heaven with just this simple one meal here well they seem to come back from that right hand side of the lake

towards the left hand side but via Bethsaida at the very top it's not in Herod Antipas's territory it's just over the Jordan River and so it's in Golanitis which is Philip's territory and there he Jesus walks on water something that the Old Testament says that God does in a poem in Job chapter 9 but interestingly according to a Jewish writing of a bit after Jesus a book called the Talmud Jewish rowers or boatsmen fishermen would have sometimes written on their oars words along the lines of I am Yahweh or I am the

Lord I am who I am words to that sort of effect as though somehow they were trying to still the sea which for Jewish people was an evil sort of thing something that they were relatively afraid of Jewish people were not great seafarers they didn't sail off into the Mediterranean very happily and Jesus words here in verse 50 of chapter 6 he says take heart it is I literally I am which is what you get written sort of on those Jewish oars so maybe Jesus is saying something deliberately here as well he's making a veiled claim to be divine he's not just a prophet or a teacher or a miracle worker or a healer there is a claim to being divine here in Jesus words in verse 50 well from Bethsaida they go eventually around to the left-hand side of the Sea of Galilee to Gennesaret a name that's sometimes used for the sea as well as Sea of

Gennesaret and there again there is more healing and as usual Jesus does not initiate it but rather responds with compassion on those who are sick who come and beg for healing well now we go into another cycle of rejection in chapter 7 this is another dispute that arises we've already seen some disputes last week the Jewish authorities the Pharisees the scribes even scribes who've come up from Jerusalem no doubt to see and check out what's going on up in the Galilee have already objected to Jesus involved with blasphemy when he forgave a person's sins in chapter 2 issues of fasting later in chapter 2 and issues of the Sabbath and his disciples breaking the Sabbath laws at the end of chapter 2 and beginning of chapter 3 each of those objections Jesus responded to by directing attention to himself and who he is in effect as God who can forgive as the Lord of the Sabbath the bridegroom and each of those objections we saw last week was asked with a question why why do your disciples do this why do you say this and here is no exception in verse 5 these Pharisees and the scribes asked him why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders but each with defiled hands that is Jesus disciples had not been washing their hands according to the

Jewish ritual before eating a meal now Jesus objects here in stronger terms than what he does in the other cases and what we get here is an intensifying of the rejection of Jesus and his response to it there he sort of didn't sort of criticize them for their views but just said who he was and why he did what he did but here Jesus comes out very bluntly and accuses them of hypocrisy because what he's objecting to are not the laws of the Old Testament but their own traditions of the elders as it's called here in a few verses I need to explain here that in Jesus day the Jews were bound according to the Pharisees by two sets of laws that went together the laws of the Old Testament of which they said there were 612 or 13 and the oral laws which the Pharisees claimed God had given to Moses on Mount Sinai with all the rest back in the Old Testament but Moses had never written them down they just been passed on from word of by word of mouth over the centuries they were much more restrictive laws at no point does Jesus ever reject laws that are in the Old Testament but when they are traditions of the elders the oral laws that are handed down that aren't in the

Old Testament Jesus very clearly rejects them and here's the passage above all that he does it in in chapter 7 we don't have time to look at all the detail but he accuses them of hypocrisy of holding to their traditions in such a way that they actually end up breaking the laws of the Old Testament themselves but the issue here in particular is the issue of cleanness the Pharisees were saying that they were disciples were unclean because they hadn't had a ritual washing of their hands before a meal but Jesus says it's not what goes from the outside in that makes a person unclean but it's what comes out of their heart and that's where the Pharisees had got it wrong because they thought cleanness and getting right with God was just a ritual act of washing hands a sort of external act but Jesus says what you've missed is you've put up a ritual cleansing and you've failed to see that far more important is a moral cleansing from the heart and that's the issue now there are two implications I think in what Jesus is saying here one is he's implying that he can deal with moral uncleanness and secondly we're told in the brackets in this passage in verse 19 he declared all foods clean that is ritual uncleanness is no longer significant now significance of that is to say that it's no longer just Jews that can be ritually clean Gentiles as well the issue of what foods are clean and unclean is a way of distinguishing Jews from Gentiles in the Old Testament Jesus here is

saying that now for God moral cleanness is not just something for Jews but it's something for people of all races Jew and Gentile and what follows then from that incident in chapter 7 verses 1 to 23 is Jesus concerned now for Gentiles we've seen glimpses of it already when he's on the right-hand side of the lake but now it becomes much more pronounced so we find that after that incident in 7 verses 20 verse 24 from there Jesus set out and went away to the region of Tyre well Tyre is way up there on the coast the region of

[38 : 39] Tyre would have come quite a way inland so he probably didn't go all the way to Tyre but he's certainly gone well north of the Galilee out of Herod Antipas's territory completely different country pagan country Gentile country not a Jewish area at all and there he deals with a woman from Syrophenicia and she begs him to cast a demon out and he said to her let the children be fed first for it's not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs that's verse 27 what an odd thing to say to a woman who begs for a demon to be here to cast out but she answered him even more astonishingly sir even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs now basically the thrust there is Jesus is saying I have come first for the Jews and she says yeah that may be all very well but just because you've come first for the Jews doesn't mean you're not also for the Gentiles even the dogs eat the crumbs and Jesus says to her for saying that you may go the demons left your daughter there is great faith there that

Jesus is not just for the Jews but for the Gentile and how ironic that it comes from a pagan woman now I know that it's slightly complicated story and I've brushed over it very quickly certainly the words about dogs is a little bit derogatory but the typical way that a Jew would talk about a Gentile here is a woman saying what is true about Jesus that yes he might come for the Jews first but that's not exclusive Jesus is also for Gentiles and that continues in the next paragraph the next incident where Jesus now in the region of the Decapolis heals a deaf man the Decapolis is also a Gentile area Jesus has come from up there down to over here or maybe across to Damascus in the top very right of that map which is part of the Decapolis Gentile area again here he heals a deaf man what was expected of the Messiah for Jews in the Old Testament for example Isaiah 35 about healing the deaf giving the deaf ears to hear Jesus is doing for Gentiles and then in the next chapter verses 1 to 10 of chapter 8 where he feeds the 4,000 clearly these are Gentiles not Jews and so just as the climax of Jesus work for the Jews was the feeding of the 5,000 now the feeding of 4,000 is the climax of his ministry for the Gentiles at least in the first half of Mark of course Jesus life has been dotted with signs of the kingdom and of him as the king he's taught he's healed he's cast out demons now from the Gentile area and he's just done a little grand tour of Gentile areas he comes back into Jewish territory in chapter 8 verse 10 immediately he got into the boat with his disciples so he's probably on the right hand side of the sea of Galilee and he's gone across to Dalmanapha which I've marked in there on the left hand side of the map back into Jewish area and now it's the Pharisees who come again and reject him again always the rejection comes from the Jewish authorities and Herod in Jewish areas and they came and they argued with him asking him for a sign from heaven to test him and Jesus refuses to give them one and the reason he refuses to give them one is because he's already given them plenty in effect he's healed he's taught he's proclaimed the gospel he's cast out demons if they had ears to hear if they had eyes to see if they had hearts to believe they would have seen the signs and followed him and trusted him and believed in him but they haven't so what's the use of another sign what's the use of another miracle you know people today sometimes say oh if only I saw a miracle then I'd believe in Jesus but I doubt that many if any would it's just an excuse not to believe here are Pharisees that Jesus refuses to give another sign to and by and by and large in Mark's gospel he's given up giving any more miracles and signs to Jews just a few exceptions here and there well he moves on back to Bethsaida from there so we're now back up at the lake at the top again slightly Gentile territory probably a bit of a mix and here he heals a blind man putting together two miracles he's just healed a deaf man and now a blind man and so often in the Old Testament the expectation of what God will do in people's lives or what the Messiah will do for people's lives is to give enable the deaf to hear and the blind to see and Jesus has done both and it is clearly a sign that he is the Messiah that the Old Testament expects that at the day when all the redeemed of the Lord will come back to the Lord the deaf will hear the blind will see and Jesus has done that now there really can be no doubt who he is although so many don't believe in him interestingly for this man at Bethsaida this blind man whom Jesus heals he does it in two stages he takes a bit of spit and probably because the issue about blindness and deafness is about being being cut off from God's

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