

SUMMER 2 - Mark, the Man - Who do You Say I am?

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[0 : 00] Well, tonight we're covering Mark chapters 5 to most of the way through chapter 8, and that's just two segments of what we'll be looking at tonight.

I will occasionally refer to a little map that I'll use up here. So if you, I mean, it's not crucial, but you may like to move further forward, and you can do that during the next hymn before the study if you wish.

We're going to sing again from the Blue Hymn Books, number 453, a hymn of praise to God that Jesus Christ is our great high priest, in effect, before the throne of God above, and we'll sing it with a tune that makes what is printed as six verses into three verses, and we repeat the last line of what therefore is the end of each of the three verses.

I hope that's clear. I'm sure it will be when we sing it. So let's stand and sing before the throne of God above, number 453. Please be seated. And let's pray.

Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for these words in Mark's Gospel, recording for us the words, the works of Jesus, responses to him so that we may know him, understand that we may repent of our sins, and trust in him for eternal salvation, and for membership of the kingdom of God.

[1 : 27] So help us tonight, we pray. For Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, who do people say that Jesus is?

One of the oldest questions for Christians. It's here in tonight's part of Mark, in effect. But there are more books written about Jesus than any other person in history, and they keep on coming.

There's no sign of them abating at all. We might well think that our world's moved on, and it's time for books to come about other people. But not so. There are books after books after books to do with Jesus still, and all with different angles.

Well, some with different angles, I suppose, about who they claim that Jesus is primarily or fundamentally. Jesus the Jew has been the sort of rage in some books in the last many years. Jesus the revolutionary. Jesus the rabbi. Jesus the healer. Jesus the prophet. Jesus the deluded maniac.

[2 : 36] Jesus the politician. Since the finding of the Dead Sea Scrolls from 1947, Jesus the Essene. And the links, or perhaps not the links, between Jesus and the Qumran Dead Sea community.

Jesus the ascetic. Jesus the guru or the cult figure. Jesus the magician. The options abound. There are more than what I've just said.

In the end, the question is, as Jesus asks it, who do you say that I am? Part of the difficulty is it's so hard to categorise Jesus.

See, some of those above descriptions that I've mentioned have some aspects of truth. Jesus the prophet. There's truth in that. Jesus the Jew. There's certainly truth in that. Jesus the rabbi. There's even truth in that. Jesus the healer. And so on. But in the end, each of those is insufficient for describing what or who Jesus is. Jesus is bigger than most of our categories allow.

[3 : 38] And he was certainly bigger than the categories of the first century AD in which he lived and walked in Galilee and in Palestine and Israel. Bigger than we think. I remember a number of years ago now going back to my old primary school.

For three years I was at primary school in England. And I went back thinking that the assembly hall was a vast auditorium. And the highlight of my childhood life was performing in Oliver in this vast auditorium of my primary school before, you know, crowds of thousands of cheering people.

Well, my mother and father, I guess. But getting there was a shock because they've obviously shrunk the assembly hall. It's quite small, in fact.

And nowhere near the... I can't work out how the thousands would have got into this assembly hall. It's the reverse, in a sense. You think something's actually bigger than it is. Or the opposite direction.

You go somewhere and the place is vast. You know, people who might go to the MCG for the first time and think, what a vast auditorium this is. Beyond their expectations. Well, for Jesus, our expectations usually are too small.

[4 : 49] He's bigger, even than our best definitions and best expectations, best categories, in a sense. He's a bit like one of those huge, difficult-shaped presents that you try and wrap at Christmas and disguise what it is, but always without success.

He's too big to categorise, to put in a box, to wrap up and tie up easily. And we've got to keep that in mind as we keep reading the Gospels and keep seeing our picture of Jesus being enlarged.

Well, that's by way of preamble into Mark 5 through to most of chapter 8 tonight. Building on what we saw last week, the amazement, the astonishment, the authority of Jesus demonstrated in various ways and people's wonderment at that.

The story continues into chapter 5. And in these chapters, Jesus goes to and fro across around, by and large, the Sea of Galilee in the north of Israel.

And that's what this stunning map is here. Somebody rightly identified, that's the Sea of Galilee. That's the Sea of Galilee, not the bit elsewhere.

[6 : 01] And the line on the left-hand side, for those who can see, is the coastline of the Mediterranean, which is further out. And the area roughly around the Sea of Galilee is called Galilee. Not surprisingly, perhaps.

And we see at the beginning of chapter 5, they came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. Last week, we saw that Jesus was mainly in Jewish territory in Galilee, mainly based at Capernaum, which is just inside the Jewish territory, ruled over at the time of Jesus by a son of Herod the Great, I mentioned last week, called Herod Antipas.

His capital was actually a place called Tiberias, to which we never hear of Jesus going, a fairly unclean place, really, for Jews to go. And the first bit I did was a T for Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus had come from Nazareth, which is a bit further south and inland, and just north of Nazareth, Antipas had built a very nice city called Sepphoris. And many people think that, quite possibly coming from a carpentry or stonemason family, as Jesus did, Joseph, maybe Jesus himself, were part of the builders that would have travelled into Sepphoris, perhaps, to build that city for Antipas. Jesus now, at the beginning of chapter 5, goes across to the other side of the lake, to Gentile territory, largely. And I'll put a G there for Gentile, or I could put a G there for the Gerasenes, as chapter 5, verse 1 suggests.

[7 : 37] This is now out of the territory of Herod Antipas. And it's into, at least in the north bit, the brother or a stepbrother of Antipas called Philip, much more benign figure than Herod Antipas, a safer place for Jesus to go.

So it's worth, as you're reading through the Gospel, to get a feel for the to-ing and fro-ing of where Jesus goes. And some of the little bits of the geography actually help us understand what Jesus is saying.

Well, in chapter 5, verses 1 through to 20, Jesus comes to the demoniac, the man possessed by demons.

As I say, it's on the Gentile side. We know that there are pigs there. Of course, pigs are unclean for Jews, so it's in Gentile, non-Jewish territory that Jesus comes to this man.

Possibly, actually, this place is actually a pagan area, not even under Philip's jurisdiction. In part of what was called the Decapolis, ten cities, Roman or actually originally Greek cities set up by Alexander the Great.

[8 : 41] But they kept their own sort of independent alliance. And they ranged from halfway down the Sea of Galilee, if you like, on the eastern side, all the way down including the modern city of Amman, the capital of Jordan, a whole range of towns in modern Jordan, including, say, Jerash.

One city on the other side of the Jordan River called Sathopolis or Beit Sharn, about there. And quite possibly, this garrison area was within the Decapolis, very much a pagan Gentile area, especially.

And there Jesus is confronted by this man, or confronts the man who's possessed by demons, a legion of them. And Jesus takes the initiative to cast them out.

And Jesus always, with demons, takes the initiative with them. But compare that with someone who's sick. They are people who come to Jesus for help. He doesn't take the initiative with them, usually.

He takes the initiative to cast out demons. But the healing of the sick is his response of compassion to those who ask him for help. Maybe there's an element of priority there, that the casting out of demons is a priority for Jesus.

[9 : 59] And he's happy to act with compassion on those who are sick. But healing the sick is not his top priority. Maybe a way of seeing that distinction being made.

Well, Jesus has already cast out a demon, if you remember back in chapter 1 at Capernaum. Here too, the same sort of thing. And as we saw last week, with some sadness, maybe irony, it is demons who actually acknowledge who Jesus is.

Other people are left confused, blinded, deaf to what he's saying, unsure of who he is. And that's the big question in Mark's Gospel. Who is he? In the first half especially.

But the demons know. Back in chapter 1, verse 24, the demon of the person in Capernaum said, What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?

Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God. And there is truth on the lips of a demon. They know who Jesus is, and moreover, they know what he's come to do, to destroy them.

[11 : 06] Or so we find here in chapter 5, verse 7. What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?

I adjure you by God, do not torment me. Again, the demons acknowledge who Jesus is by name. Jesus, they use.

And they know that he's come to destroy them. They're terrified. There's a battle between demons, elements of Satan, if you like, and Jesus.

So here is the satanic versus Jesus confrontation explicitly. One that runs through the Gospel of Mark, and the other Gospels for that matter as well. One that sometimes we perhaps downplay.

But it's there all the way. Jesus battling with Satan, and triumphing finally over him, on the cross, of course, at the end or towards the end of the Gospels.

[12 : 06] Well, Jesus casts out the demons into the pigs they go, into the lake they go, to destruction. And then Jesus commands the man, in chapter 5, verse 19, go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you.

And that's striking, on a number of counts. It's striking because we've seen last week that sometimes Jesus said to people, don't tell anyone. Be quiet about it.

Why is Jesus happy, and in fact encouraging of the man now, to tell everyone? Well, quite possibly, it's because he's out in Gentile territory. See, the opposition to Jesus is a Jewish opposition fundamentally.

And it partly comes because of, one, the entrenched power of the Pharisees and scribes, that is under threat by Jesus, and two, the opposition comes about because of false expectations of what the Messiah will do.

So Jesus is, in Jewish territory, usually, trying to dampen down the public acclaim. He doesn't want to raise the opposition level too high too quickly.

[13 : 20] He knows, from the beginning, I'm sure, that he will die on a cross. But there are various things that Jesus has come to do and to teach. And so he tries, in Jewish territory, to stall that sense of opposition that will inevitably come when huge crowds develop.

And he's often unsuccessful in dampening down that acclaim. But in the Gentile territory, that is not so much a concern. He's outside Herod Antipas' jurisdiction, in particular, and so he encourages the man to tell others, as of course he would do.

Notice too, the other thing about what he says to the man is, tell your friends how much the Lord has done for you. A word that I'm sure has implications, at least, of divinity.

Jesus is the Lord. He's not shy about that in some contexts. And so here is Jesus, I think, at least alluding to himself as Lord, in terms that would have resonated with the Old Testament, although it's a Gentile context.

Interestingly, the people who are the neighbours of this demonised man whose demons are now cast out, they don't say, Jesus, stay and do other things for us. They actually want Jesus to go, sadly, in verse 17.

[14:44] And it shows there the confusion that we see all the way through the Gospel about who Jesus is. He might well do a remarkable miracle that brings great good, and yet people want him to go, to get out of their way, time and again.

You know, sometimes people say, you know, if they're doubters or unbelievers to me sometimes, why can't God do another miracle then I might believe? But actually, they've got it wrong. They probably won't, because people then didn't. Miracles aren't in the end. Usually, the thing that actually creates faith in people. Well, back across the sea he goes.

Verse 21, when Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, back to the Jewish side, back to Galilee, Jesus now goes in verse 21.

So he's probably sailed back across the sea to Capernaum, maybe slightly further south to Gennesaret, Magdala, towns that were on the border of the sea, most probably not down to Tiberias, a fairly Roman city that Jesus, it seems, avoided.

[15:52] And so he's back into Herod Antipas, Jewish territory now, where he'd spent most of, if not all of, the first four chapters of Mark that we looked at last week. And here come two incidents, one enmeshed in the other.

Some people call this a Markan sandwich. One incident begins, leads into another incident, and then the first one is resolved after it. Firstly, he's confronted by a leader of the synagogue named Jairus, whose daughter is ill.

And he pleads with Jesus for his daughter to be made well. Clearly, Jesus has got public acclaim. We saw that last week, already by chapter two, when they couldn't all get into the house, when they had to lower the man through the roof of the house.

Clearly, there's huge crowds in that part of Galilee, around the lake, around Capernaum, and that sort of area. And here it is again, a great crowd gathered round Jesus.

And no doubt Jairus is not the only one wanting something of him, but he's the one who's recorded here in Mark. And he begged him repeatedly, we're told in verse 23, an element of desperation, trying to get Jesus to help him because his daughter is at the point of death.

[17:06] Come and lay your hands on her so that she may be made well and live. And Jesus accedes to that. He goes with him, we're told in verse 24. But then comes the other incident, because en route with Jairus to his house to heal the daughter, a bleeding woman comes and touches Jesus' cloak.

A woman that would have been regarded as unclean, ritually. Not sinful because of bleeding, but unclean. That is, she wouldn't have been allowed into the sort of prayers that women might be part of.

She would be regarded as ritually unclean, maybe not able to offer sacrifices or contribute in that way to the sacrifices down in Jerusalem, that sort of thing. And she's got an ongoing bleeding problem that would have cut her out ritually from the people of God and maybe socially as well. And she, with a mixture perhaps of faith or certainly some superstition, touches Jesus' cloak. Jesus detects all of this and asks for her to identify herself.

And then in verse, her hemorrhage stops immediately, we're told, in verse 29, as soon as she's touched Jesus. So clearly, you know, her desperate prayers, if you like, are answered.

[18:30] But Jesus asks in verse 30, who touched my clothes? There's so many people here, how can you ask that sort of question? The woman comes before him, though, in response to that, in verse 33.

And in verse 34, he said to her, daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace and be healed of your disease. I think Jesus' words of drawing her out publicly, of course, was not to humiliate her. But it was perhaps to correct some superstition. Your faith has made you well. He gives the words of healing. That is, Jesus doesn't want people to be confused.

It's he who has the power to heal in all of this. And the language that he uses, your faith has made you well, is literally, your faith has saved you. So the word salvation has this idea of physical healing in some contexts about it.

But it's much more than that, as the Gospels make clear to us. Well, then we go on, because people now come, we go back to Jairus' situation, and he's now told, your daughter is dead.

[19 : 38] So in the intervening period, which may not have been very long, his daughter, who was at the point of death, has now died. And he's told that, and told or asked, why trouble the teacher any further at the end of verse 35?

But Jesus' words back, do not fear, only believe. Verse 36. And it's the same combination that occurs in other places, either the language, faith, fear, put together, or at least the ideas put together.

So the same on the boat that we saw at the end of last week. The disciples were afraid, verse 40 of chapter 4, have you still no faith?

That is, faith casts out fear, is the juxtaposition that's being taught, there and here, and with the woman even. Though the language of fear is not there, Jesus says, your faith has made you well, go in peace, rather than perhaps in fear.

So here is the commendation of faith, that will cast out fear. And again with Jairus, do not fear, verse 36, only believe, or have faith.

[20 : 58] The language believe, faith, is the same word in Greek, but in English we end up using two different words sometimes to translate the one word. And they go, and he takes just a handful of disciples, the girl's parents, raises her from the dead.

A more significant miracle, of course, than healing. And maybe as we know with the case of Lazarus in John's Gospel, Jesus was not fussed about her dying, but able to draw more attention to himself by the greater miracle.

Now of course, this miracle, not only a miracle of healing, but a miracle of raising her from the dead, points to the resurrection of Jesus himself. And the resurrection life that belongs then to those who trust him, that comes after his own resurrection.

In the case of Lazarus, of course, that was made much more explicit when Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life. Mark leaves a little bit more unsaid, in a sense, than John does.

But the same ideas are there. It is pointing forward to the real act of salvation, to the real resurrection life, that Jesus will demonstrate so astonishingly at the end of this Gospel.

[22 : 08] Jesus says, in verse 43, he strictly ordered them, in fact, no one should know this, and told them to give us something to eat.

No one should know this. Unlike the man over the other side of the lake, go and tell everyone how much the Lord has done for you, but here, don't tell people. Back in Herod Antipas' territory, back where the crowds have got a mixture of false expectations, and some hostility, as we've already seen from chapter 2, now Jesus is trying to dampen down, to dampen down the danger that is building, because as the crowds build, the opposition builds as well.

Well, that's a little sequence of miracles, and now it's followed by a sequence of rejection. And what we saw last week begins to build in intensity this week. That is, we do see Jesus performing all sorts of miracles, and people being astonished, but very early on last week, we saw just those glimpses of hostility and opposition.

The scribes, even the scribes from Jerusalem who'd come up, as we saw last week. Those who were muttering about his blasphemy at the beginning of chapter 2. So very early on, the opposition is there, and we see it beginning to increase in the passages today.

Jesus, we're told, at the beginning of chapter 6, left that place and came to his hometown. Probably that's Nazareth. There's reference in this section to his own family.

[23 : 41] Jesus, of course, or Joseph and Mary, I should say, had been in Nazareth, and come from Nazareth. Jesus was born way down south, in Judea, in Bethlehem, because Joseph was descended from David.

But now they've come, obviously in Jesus' childhood, back up to Nazareth, and that's Jesus' hometown. And we're told that, well, no, I should say, that Nazareth is a bit south of the lake. The end here, for those who can't quite see, it's a bit like the current MCG scoreboard, because they're doing the building works at MCG. The scoreboard's too small, and I've sat there at the cricket, squinting, trying to read the scoreboard.

Well, sorry, you've got to do the same tonight, some of you at the back. But Nazareth is high up. So you go up the hills to Nazareth, and that's where he's gone now. It's still part of Galilee, and it's still part of Herod Antipas' territory, but it's his hometown.

Maybe back in Nazareth, Jesus is not quite so well known, as he already is, around the northwest side of the lake, where most of his adult ministry is conducted, or was conducted.

[24 : 46] Jesus, we're told, at the beginning of chapter 6, came back to his hometown. On the Sabbath, he began to teach in the synagogue, something that probably he wouldn't now be allowed to do in Capernaum, given the build-up of acclaim and opposition there that we saw last week.

So maybe there's not quite the acclaim in Nazareth. And many who heard him were astounded, exactly the thing we saw last week, back in chapter 1, when he spoke in the synagogue at Capernaum.

They said, where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that's been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?

No mention of Joseph. Maybe he's dead already. And isn't he the brother of James, and Joseph, and Judas, and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?

Now, sadly, some strands of Christian faith teach that Mary remained a virgin, but here we have a very clear statement of the brothers of Jesus, and they're linked to Jesus being the son of Mary, not the son of Joseph.

[25 : 52] I think it's a crazy doctrine to try and teach that Mary remained a virgin, where clearly Jesus has brothers. James eventually became a Christian and a leader of the church in Jerusalem. But here are four of Jesus' brothers mentioned, and sisters whose names are not mentioned, but there are sisters as well.

Jesus clearly was the eldest because his mother was a virgin leading up to his birth, but clearly she and Joseph were married and then had other children thereafter.

And they took offense at him. And then Jesus said to them, prophets are not without honor except in their hometown and among their own kin and in their own house.

It's a focusing or narrowing down. Prophets are not without honor generally, but in their own town, among their own kin, smaller group within the town, and even in their own house, Jesus is saying, I'm without honor.

He's not at all denying that he's a prophet. In fact, he's making a claim to be a prophet, although we know he's more than that. But here he is back home and without honor.

[27 : 06] They're offended by him. They don't want to listen to him. In effect, they ridicule and rubbish the miracles and the healings that he's performed and that they've heard about. And we're told in verse 5, he could do no deed of power there except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them, which in itself is astonishing.

But he could do no work of power there. We could interpret that as saying Jesus is limited by their rejection of him. But I think in the end that that would not fit comfortably with the nature of Jesus that we're taught on the whole in the scriptures.

I suspect that Jesus chooses not to do much there. They don't come to him for healing. They're rejecting him. He never takes the initiative for healing, apart from these few sick people whom he cured.

I don't think Jesus is limited by our lack of faith. I don't think God is limited by our lack of faith, although sometimes you hear that sort of thing said. If God is limited by our lack of faith, he's not God. He can do what he likes.

And Jesus could have healed many here, I suspect, but chose not to because of their rejection and their lack of faith. And where we've had consistently in this gospel people being amazed at Jesus' authority, here we're told he was amazed at their unbelief.

[28 : 30] A sort of flip side, if you like, almost. The opposite. So the rejection is the theme of the beginning of chapter 6. And an astonishing rejection.

His own family, his own town, they took offence at him. It's actually strong language of rejection. It's not an ambivalence. It's an opposition for which Jesus is amazed.

So the rejection gets progressively greater and sadder in effect to this point. That even in his own town they reject him. And so he goes off at the end of chapter 6 among the villagers teaching.

It's exactly what he did remember down in Capernaum when the bit of a fuss and the public acclaim and the crowds got too great. He went out then to the villagers round about Capernaum in the north part of Galilee. Now he does the same in the south part of Galilee around Nazareth to all the little villagers round about.

And he went there teaching because that's his primary thing at this stage to teach about the kingdom. No doubt he did healings. No doubt he might have cast out demons as well. But teaching remained a priority with him.

[29 : 40] Now it's the disciples turn as well. The rest of this paragraph verses 7 through to 13. The disciples remember we saw last week in chapter 1 at least four of them were called to be fishers of men.

Now they get their opportunity. So they've seen Jesus operate in north Galilee around Capernaum across the lake briefly in Gentile territory now in the south of Galilee around Nazareth and now they are sent out on their own mission to be fishers of men.

It's an odd sort of mission. They go out in twos maybe for safety maybe for self-correction who knows. They're not to take anything except a staff no food no bag no money they're to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics that is they're on the road.

Some say there's reminiscence here about Israel fleeing Egypt when they had to wear sandals and be ready to get going quickly. If that is an illusion that's valid then this is saying that just as God turned his judgment on Egypt back in the book of Exodus maybe there's an element of judgment on Israel here.

I think that might be too strong a statement it's a bit vague an illusion in my opinion but some people argue that. And he says to them wherever you enter house stay there until you leave the place if any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you as you leave shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.

[31 : 09] That's an act of sort of judgment you know it's sort of like you know putting your waving your hand by your nose a sort of oh well you know if you don't want me off I go sort of thing an act of judgment or rebuke back at them.

So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent notice primarily a teaching but they also cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them. That is replicating what Jesus did it's showing that Jesus in effect is able to pass on this power if you like to his followers but we must be very careful here because many times I've heard this passage or the equivalent in Luke in particular preached on as a paradigm for Christian mission I think it's in Luke in particular that it's to the people of Israel only there to go this is a very distinctive unique if you like mission limited to the twelve disciples limited in time limited under the power of Jesus bodily not presence with them all the way but sending them out and then receiving them back I don't think this is meant to be a paradigm of Christian mission it's a foretaste of what will happen in the Acts of the Apostles but there I don't think the instructions are take no bread no bag no money all that sort of thing that's not an ongoing part of the Christian mission it's limited for this particular mission around the area of Galilee most probably limited to that well we come to chapter 6 verse 14 and clearly the fame of Jesus has been spreading far and wide

King Herod that is Herod Antipas Herod the great remember died just after Jesus was born Herod Antipas one of his sons the ruler in Galilee he has heard of this mission and heard of Jesus for Jesus name had become known and people were saying John the baptised has been raised from the dead and for this reason the powers are at work in him others said it's Elijah others said it's a prophet like one of the prophets of old but when Herod heard of it he said John whom I beheaded has been raised and then what follows from verse 17 all the way through to verse 29 is the retrospect of the death of John the Baptist to explain to us the reader because we've not been told to this point that John the Baptist was dead nor that Herod Antipas killed him so that in a sense puts it in context but the crucial things actually verses 14 to 16 really it's all the questions about who is this Jesus and that's what Mark is wanting us to ask as we read the gospel who is Jesus is it Elijah the prophet come back

Elijah who was taken up in a chariot of fire and therefore didn't die on earth and therefore there were great expectations in the years or century or two leading up to Jesus that he would return Malachi indicated that at the very end of the Old Testament is it John the Baptist who somehow has been raised from the dead or come back to haunt Antipas is his statement in verse 16 a statement of guilt because we know that Herod Antipas didn't actually want to kill John the Baptist but was sort of manipulated or tricked into it at that feast if you remember by Herodias is it just a prophet who is this Jesus but the question the issue here is more than just who is this Jesus because there is a danger dangerous bells if you like are ringing as the musical background here this is not just innocent questions John the Baptist is dead dead because of opposition to who he was what he said and taught the association of Jesus with

John the Baptist is clear we saw it at the early part of Mark it's being made here as well that is as we're reading here we are seeing an escalation of opposition to Jesus and we are seeing the note

of death being sounded already John the Baptist is dead is that the same fate that will befall Jesus we know of course it is but can you see how it's being how we're being told that that opposition is already very hostile very dangerous and even in these early stages of the gospel and so the question who is Jesus is a life death question it's not just an innocent question because if you think in here that Jesus is not the Messiah but John the Baptist raised in the dead or just another prophet then you're taking sides against Jesus looking for his death and of course in the end it flips back on us the respondents who is Jesus it's a life and death question if he's the

[36 : 05] Messiah and we trust him and repent of our sins as he asks us to the kingdom of God is ours and life eternal is ours but if we reject him then ultimately it's death for us as the gospel makes clear well in contrast to the feast where John the Baptist lost his head we come to another feast from verse 30 of chapter 6 onwards to verse 44 the feeding of the 5,000 he says to them in verse 31 come away to a deserted place all by yourselves rest a while there were lots of people they went away we're told in verse 32 in a boat to a deserted place by themselves many saw and hurried after them on foot and so a big crowd eventuates there's lots of debate about where this happens if you go to Israel you'll see a little church on the side of the lake that commemorates the feeding of the 5,000 it's in the Jewish western northwestern part of the shore of the sea of Galilee not far around from

Capernaum but quite possibly this element of a deserted place that Mark emphasises here we're meant to see actually the other side of the lake and people who've walked around the lake in their crowds following Jesus across a boat and maybe coming some of them by boat as well who knows to this part of it to perhaps Philip's area of jurisdiction on the other side of the lake and the context of the crowd seems to be the disciples return from their mission the elements about John the Baptist has been a bit of an interlude if you like they're reporting back to Jesus the crowds that have followed them and following Jesus and their disciples if they've gone preaching Jesus in the kingdom these are people perhaps who've followed the disciples back to Jesus to see the Jesus whom they've been preaching about and we're told that there are 5,000 indeed 5,000 men we're told in another gospel and women and children besides that so it's probably a very big crowd it's the only miracle that's told in all four of the gospels so a very significant event occurring here so most probably it's across the lake out of

Herod Antipas's territory and that comes in a clear context of Herod Antipas musing about who Jesus is and having put John the Baptist to death so Jesus is escaping in a sense part of that dangerous territory to a deserted place that's emphasised and he feeds a multitude miraculously now John's gospel makes it more explicit but I think even the language of a deserted place or a wilderness as well as the miracle itself is meant to remind us of the feeding of Israel in the wilderness with the manna that was miraculously provided by God under the leadership of Moses here is a resonance of that that John chapter 6 makes more explicit but Mark has got enough signals there for us to see them here is Jesus greater than Moses feeding a multitude miraculously even with leftovers as well it ends abruptly it seems verse 42 all eight were filled they took up 12 baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish those who'd eaten the loaves numbered 5,000 men and immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side to Bethsaida while he dismissed the crowd now the tapes being changed at this point disciples go by boat probably that sort of way because Bethsaida is just across from Capernaum in

Herod Phillips territory little border between them at the Jordan River from Antipas to Herod Phillips territory where the tax collectors booths would have been they've gone by boat Jesus goes up a mountain there are there are certainly steep mountains here because this is the Golan Heights just above and so up until the 67 or 72 war the Syrians had the top of the Golan Heights and were basically throwing boulders down on the Israelis right down below no wonder Israel wanted the Golan Heights it's certainly mountains you go up to pray a deserted place certainly a bit of a wilderness area most probably the area where this happened and then we're told in verse 53 verse 45 47 when evening came the boat was out on the sea with the disciples Jesus was alone on the land when he saw that they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind he came towards them early in the morning perhaps in sort of 3 a.m. time that means walking on the sea when he intended to pass them by when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost and cried out they all saw him and were terrified but immediately he said to them take heart it is I do not be afraid notice there the command not to fear again most common command in the scriptures someone once told me there are 365 of them so if you read one each day this year you'll have a

day spare at the end of the year to do something else because it's a leap year but Jesus here is again in a sense performing a miracle walking on water something that shows his power over nature as we saw last week with the storm and in verse 50 he says take heart it is I literally I am it's hard to know how much weight to place on that but probably a bit Jewish writing from a time a bit after Jesus in the Talmud says that Jewish seafarers the Jews were not great seafarers on a whole had on their oars written I am or the name Yahweh or aspects along that line maybe a bit fuller than that so here is Jesus you know maybe deliberately saying I am which are words that God says is his name way back to Moses in the book of Exodus at the burning bush in Exodus 3 I am who I am maybe we're meant to see a bit of weight placed on the name of

Jesus that is an implication at least of divinity as he says in our translation it is I and certainly because it's accompanied by do not be afraid that's the language of God time and again in the Old Testament it's God who keeps saying don't be afraid so here is Jesus using the language of God and I think drawing attention to his own divinity at the time that he walks on water which is clearly an act that shows his power over the creation of God as well well well they come to Bethsaida from there they complete the journey in verse 53 across to Gennesaret so they've gone up that bit of the lake they've gone down to there now Gennesaret is back in Herod Antipas's territory on the western side of the Sea of Galilee a healing again it's not initiated by Jesus somebody comes to him and begs him and people are healed as he responds with compassion to such people and then we come into having had a couple more miracles we come back into more rejection of Jesus and this segment of chapter 7 through to verse 23 of chapter 7 from verse 1 like in chapter 3 we saw last week involves Jesus opposed to both the Pharisees and as well the

[43 : 26] Jerusalem scribes the heavies have come up from town again from Jerusalem and they're combining in opposition to Jesus previously they objected to Jesus so-called blasphemy the disciples not fasting the issues of the Sabbath if you remember from last week each of those objections was focused around the question of who is this Jesus who can do all these things or claim to do all these things now what's happening is that the disciples have not washed their hands before a meal and there's this objection we get the question why which is the usual way these objections have been phrased verse 5 why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders but eat with defiled hands and there in a sense they give themselves away the ritual of washing your hands was one in the Old Testament for priests only but the Pharisees in the time leading up to Jesus had made that apply to all Jews that is they'd increased the legalism and so here they've Jesus it's the tradition of the elders it's not a law of the Old Testament and

Jesus objects to that see how he quotes Isaiah in verse 6 and 7 this people honours me with their lips but their hearts are far from me in vain do they worship me teaching human precepts as doctrines that's always important to get right that Jesus never ever rejects or infringes an Old Testament law but he does break the traditions of the elders the additional oral laws that the Pharisees claimed had also been given by God to Moses but never written down in the Old Testament just passed along orally and that they would have equal weight well they don't in Jesus eyes we shouldn't be conned by that sort of additional legalism and adding laws to what's there Jesus responds to them in verse 14 and 15 he says listen to me all of you and understand there's nothing outside a person that by going in can defile but the things that come out are what defile a little bit of a puzzle and quite often when Jesus teaches in parables later on in part in private to his disciples he explains what he said so here verse 17 says that he's left the crowd and he's entered the house and his disciples are with them with him and I ask about the parable and he says don't you understand it's what comes out of your heart that defiles you that's actually very important teaching really in the end because Jesus in saying all this we're told at the end of verse 19 declares all foods clean so one of the major Jewish distinctive laws is overthrown here laws that go back to Leviticus and Deuteronomy that the Jews must not eat certain foods because it would make them unclean and Jesus does away with that so here is an overturning of of the law but as we understand it in the Old Testament those laws were there to mark Israel out as distinctive amongst all the nations belonging to God that they alone in a sense belonging to God distinctively Jesus is by overturning the food laws here saying that each human being is unclean because of what comes out of his or her heart and also he's implying that the message that he's on about is not for Israel alone it is a message for Gentiles as well as Jews and significantly he then immediately goes into Gentile territory so notice in verse 24 he went to the region of Tyre now we're well away from Herod Antipas's territory Tyre is up here on the Mediterranean coast so he's gone well out of Jewish

territory into Gentile territory having declared all foods clean he's overthrown the Jewish distinctiveness and now he demonstrates that by going into Gentile territory very clearly he's already dabbled in it down here with the Gerasene demoniac probably and now very clearly and what we find so surprising is that though you'd expect Jews to say here's the Messiah not at all a Syrophenician woman persists in asking for Jesus blessing and he responds with in effect commenting about well maybe not so so much explicitly but but her faith you know for saying that he says in verse 29 you may go the demon has left your daughter that is here is a pagan Gentile woman and she's persisted with Jesus for healing and then we're told in verse 31 Jesus returned from the region of Tyre and he went by the way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee now someone once said it's like going from Sydney to Melbourne via Brisbane it's probably not quite as dramatic as that Sidon is further up the coast in modern Lebanon but what's happening here is not that Mark's got his geography wrong as some sceptics think but rather that Jesus is avoiding going back into Herod Antipas's Jewish territory again where the opposition is so keen so he's going north and probably around before he comes back down and so we see that he comes to the Decapolis in verse 31 into the region of the Decapolis that means this bottom south east part of the Sea of Galilee pagan territory again Gentile territory again these ten cities set up originally by Alexander the Great he heals a deaf man and we're told in verse 37 at the very end of chapter 7 these Gentile people are saying he has done everything well he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak and it's as though they're quoting ironically from Isaiah 35 and what I think we're meant to see is that just like the demons were the only people who acknowledged who Jesus really was here we find Gentiles more full of faith and observance than the Jews who keep on being blind and deaf and rather indignant against

[49 : 29] Jesus and full of opposition and then this this Gentile ministry continues in chapter 8 because now we see the feeding of the 4,000 not that we've got two stories you know one event that somehow ended up two stories two different versions not at all here's a Gentile version if you like of the Jewish one that we saw back in chapter 6 the climax of Jesus ministry to Gentiles again on the Gentile side of the lake in the chapter 8 verses 1 to 10 finally after that little expedition if you like to Gentile areas Jesus in verse 10 comes back to Jewish territory Dalmanatha is back on the sort of Capernaum side of the lake back in Herod Antipas's Jewish territory and again we instantly find opposition the Pharisees came and began to argue with him verse 11 demanding a sign and Jesus says why does this generation ask for a sign I tell you no sign will be given this generation and he left them he got into the boat again he went across the other side of the lake so all that Jesus does in coming back to Jewish territory is to refuse a sign and then head back again so it shows the heightened opposition from Jews and Jewish leaders to Jesus that's been escalating all the time and then having gone back to the other side we're told in verse 14 onwards he talks to the disciples on the boat as he goes across the other side telling them to avoid the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and so on but then in verse 22 they come to Bethsaida back out of Herod

Antipas's territory though this is there's some debate about whether it was actually Gentile or Jewish little town maybe a bit of a mix and here he heals a blind man he's healed a deaf man earlier in chapter 7 now a blind man again the language of Isaiah 35 being fulfilled the expectation of the Messiah who heal the blind and heal the deaf and Jesus is doing both and making it very clear and then having gone back to Bethsaida he heads back up north about up to here to a town that we know is Caesarea Philippi but it's a Gentile town it was actually a pagan town for the god pan but Herod Philip the stepbrother of Herod Antipas had in effect rebuilt it and rededicated it to the Caesar Augustus and named it Caesarea Philippi with his own name attached to it but in honour of Caesar a Gentile and pagan town perhaps as far north that Jesus ever goes we're not quite sure but on the way he asks his disciples in verse 27 who do people say that I am now that's the question we've been asking from beginning of Mark's gospel onwards in effect who do people who is this Jesus demons know and they've said the voice from heaven in chapter one knew and said John the Baptist knew and said Mark knew and said in chapter one verse one but all these other people haven't really known even the disciples aren't really that sure at times and they give him some of the answers which we've already seen John the Baptist Elijah one of the prophets he asked well what do you say who do you say that

I am and of course that's the key question that's why Mark's written the gospel so far because he's not asking Peter James and John alone who do you say that I am but he's asking you and me the

reader who do you say that Jesus is and Peter says you are the Messiah and he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him again probably because of the confusion of expectation about who the Messiah would be the Christ the Greek word Messiah the Hebrew word that's a great confession of faith in Gentile territory at the end of the gospel its climax is the confession of faith by the Gentile Roman centurion truly this man was the son of God who is this Jesus such an array of events and teaching such opposition he's the Messiah surely but more because there's more that Peter hasn't declared that Mark has made very clear he's the Messiah not for Jews alone but for Gentiles too all foods now clean the Syrophenician woman the man healed of deafness in the Decapolis the feeding of the 4,000 Gentiles this man is not for the Jews alone but for the world who do you say that I am if Jesus is our Lord the Christ our Messiah then we must respond as the gospel began repent and believe but the next question which we'll begin to see next week is what sort of Messiah because it's not the sort of Messiah that most people would have expected well I better stop there I've gone on a bit longer than I thought I would tonight let's uh let's sing before we um maybe take a couple of questions and pray and uh we'll just have time for a couple of brief questions uh before we pray if there are any questions at all that is Glinda on the uh west side between Capernaum and Tiberius yeah any other oh sorry I should have said I've got to repeat the questions and I didn't do that last week and I've nearly forgotten again where was Genesaret or Ganesaret was the question joy if he'd been deaf from birth wouldn't it have been logical that he was also had an impediment of speech um I guess the doctors would be better off to answer I mean it sounds logical to me I would guess and that may be why uh touching the tongue and so on yes uh is that yeah question about the blind man being healed why firstly did he see trees and then secondly finally have full sight people ponder that about why because it it's I think the only sort of two-stage miracle if you like um and uh I mean there are some skeptics who think that maybe Jesus didn't quite get it right the first time I'm not sure that that that would be the way I'd want to go um but it's not really made made that clear to be honest maybe it's just you know to draw more attention to Jesus healing power or his touch of the man um yeah I've yet to be totally convinced about why that's the case uh from all the arguments I've read to be honest one more yeah well I don't think wiping off the dust of our feet um you know is there is there in in in the model of mission in the acts of the apostles or in Jesus great commission at the end of Matthew for example which I think is more paradigmatic for Christian mission I should have repeated the question that is is the dusting off of your feet part of Christian mission but I yeah so we've got to be a bit careful but um there will be times when uh when in a sense we must turn away to other people if we're involved in ministry or mission really because there are some people who are deaf and resistant to the gospel and and in the end there will come a time when at least figuratively or metaphorically if not literally we wipe the dust off our feet and move on they're very hard decisions to make I think I mean I have to make them from time to time in ministry because you can end up spending years you know with people who in the end will never respond with faith anything well I've got to think strategically here well let's uh pray if two or three people would like to lead us out loud in prayer like last time that would be great uh anything that's come out of this that you want to pray about give thanks and praise for uh please do um may be best if you stand so that more people may hear you in your prayers and feel free to pray briefly and then we'll sing a final song before we finish you