

Mark 7:31-8:33 (PM)

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[0 : 00] At the end of the passage, Melanie just read, Jesus turns to face the people who've been following him for weeks and months, which includes us, the reader.

And he asks us, But who do you say that I am? We have been orbiting around Jesus in the Gospel of Mark, following him constantly and asking, Who is this man?

Who is this man who can teach with such authority, whose words are so sharp that they cut us to the heart, revealing our sin and disorder as well as God's goodness and grace?

Who is this who can command and control demons? Who is Jesus who can heal sickness and even raise the dead? Who is the man who even the wind and waves obey?

Who can feed thousands with one person's lunch? Who is he who goes to the last and the least and the lowest, the outcast and the unwanted, and embraces them with his saving grace?

[1 : 12] Tonight, through his word, the focus of all of our questions gazes out now to us and asks us a question.

But who do you say that I am? This is the most important question of your life. More than where you'll go to school, or what you'll do with your life, or where you'll work, or who you'll marry, or if you'll get married.

How you answer this question is more important than how you are going to get by, or where you will live, or what your kids are up to, or if they will be okay.

Who do you say Jesus is? Is the most important question for every human person. Because who Jesus is tells us who we are.

His identity reveals ours. If Jesus is our Lord, then he defines us. We don't self-identify.

[2 : 22] Who Jesus is reveals to us his purpose. And so it shows us our purpose, too, as we follow him. There's no more important question in all of life.

And tonight, the loving, living eyes of Jesus gaze at you. And his words demand your answer. Who do you say that I am?

The first verse of Mark's gospel begins with the author's answer to this question. Mark 1, verse 1. The thesis statement of the whole book declares the beginning of the gospel of Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God.

Mark wants us to know that Jesus is two things. He's God's king and he is God's son. Jesus brings the kingdom of heaven to earth. He comes to save us from our sin and death.

Jesus is, in Mark's gospel, is not just a teacher or a healer or a life coach. He's God's king and he's God's son. He's God's son, extending God's kingdom to include the whole world, to include you as a child of God and a citizen of the kingdom of heaven.

[3 : 40] since that very first verse in mark the responses in jesus narrative have fallen into two categories first some people answer the question who do you say that i am by declaring that jesus is a troublemaker a hoax a false teacher an enemy or even insane many today fall into this category of unbelief thinking jesus is a good person but not divine he's good they say but not god the first response to jesus then and now is disbelief which stems from either opposition and offense or misunderstanding and ignorance the second possible response to jesus is faith to repent and believe to open your mind and your heart and try to understand the unimaginable good news that this man is god's king and god's son that the kingdom of heaven is at hand in him to allow his identity to transform yours and to participate in his work of bringing heaven to earth so who do you say jesus is two possible responses a hard heart or an open mind a closed heart or an openness to reconsider and believe unbelief or faith our text tonight presents six short scenes that are all related to each other stories of people who are physically deaf physically hungry or physically blind alongside people who are spiritually deaf spiritually blind or religiously bloated will follow jesus

through each story and then end with the question of all questions who do you say that i am scene one this is mark chapter 7 verse 31 jesus has been met with unbelief and opposition by the jewish religious authorities so he leaves the jewish region and he goes to the gentile land across the sea these people are ancestral enemies of the jewish people jews consider them unclean so being around gentiles conversing with them jews believed corrupted you and tarnished your holiness bad company corrupts good character despite this jesus journeys deep into gentile territory he goes to the region of the decapolis this is the same region where that man possessed by the legion of demons in mark 5 was restored by jesus this is the same land and the same people who a few chapters earlier asked jesus to leave they didn't want him and they didn't want his kingdom to enter their lives it was a land of unbelieving outsiders not dissimilar to vancouver well now jesus returns and perhaps that man's missionary work of telling people about jesus has been fruitful because this time that region receives him they've shifted from being hard-hearted and scared to now having open hearts and minds and we're told they bring him a man who is deaf and mute imagine it a foreign pagan man who cannot speak and cannot be spoken to he is a man who is unreachable both verbally and spiritually i found out this week november 24th my parents celebrate 50 years since their first date

50 years ago they met in a university bible study hosted by a single middle-aged woman who has a gift of hospitality and friendship especially to young people well today that same woman is now 97 and she's currently in hospital we're actually going to pray for her during our intercessions after the sermon and i visited her a couple weeks ago and when i arrived she appeared lifeless clouded open eyes and an open mouth to my great relief she awoke but i discovered there's a huge problem she's deaf and her hearing aid batteries were dead and the medication she was on had caused her speech to slur i could not understand her and she could not hear me i couldn't reach her and she couldn't reach me i fumbled around trying to fix hearing her hearing aid and replace the batteries which i've never done before turns out it's pretty difficult and i think i got it working it's hard to know when it's not your hearing aid but i still couldn't understand what she was saying so it was frustrating it was 10 minutes of frustration for both of us so i tried something else i put my bible in her lap in her bed i opened it to psalm 23 this is a passage she told me she wanted preached at her funeral at an earlier meeting and i read psalm 23 to her like you would read a story to a child with your finger running over the words i read the whole psalm and i was uncertain if she could hear anything and after i finished she looked up at me and she said clear as a bell this psalm has been so true in my life god has been so good to me i'm so blessed and she was lucid for the rest of the meeting she could hear me and i could understand her in mark there's an unreachable man he is mute and he is deaf it's hopeless it's futile he is beyond reach except that jesus reaches out to him jesus reaches out his hands he touches the broken man's ears he touches the man's unmovable tongue he looks up to heaven and he speaks to this man who cannot hear be opened and his ears are opened renewed remade and his tongue is unchained jesus reaches the unreachable he extends himself to people who we think are past all hope and he sets them free in our english bibles this man is described as having a speech impediment that's in verse 32 that word is super rare it's only used one other place in the entire bible it's found in isaiah 35 where we're given a glimpse of a future hope promised to the gentile lands north of israel the lands where jesus currently is in mark chapter 7 in isaiah 35 the prophet tells us that the wilderness and the dry land shall be glad the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus the desert shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing the glory of lebanon shall be given to it the majesty of carmel and sharon they shall see the glory of the lord the majesty of our god and now listen to verse 5 then the eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped then shall the lame man leap like a deer and finally the tongue of the mute sing for joy that last word the tongue of the mute that's the rare word that's only found elsewhere in mark 7 so jesus healing of this deaf mute man north of israel is the fulfillment of the promises of god in isaiah 35 this healing is the moment when isaiah promised the glory of the lord and the majesty of our god will be revealed to the gentiles the time is fulfilled the kingdom of god is here repent and believe in the gospel receive god's king and god's son so who is jesus in this story he is the fulfillment of isaiah 35 he is the manifestation of the glory of the lord he is the image of the invisible god he is the majesty of god incarnate god made man he can make a desert into a meadow he can unchain the tongue of a mute man to sing for joy he reaches out to touch and restore the untouchable jesus reaches the unreachable one of the ways we know who he is he does what only god can do then and now my

job here is to pastor non-christians as well as new christians to share the good news of jesus with people who have either been deaf or blind to it and let me tell you some of the stories of people who have come to faith in jesus in the past year in this community in this church are as miraculous as the healing in mark 7 jesus is still reaching out by his spirit and his church and he is touching the untouchable reaching the unreachable bringing people who have been spiritually deaf to audibly hear the voice of god and follow jesus so do not lose hope about the people in your life who are lost who are spiritually deaf to jesus call to the people who don't know the lord or who have wandered away from him jesus goes deep into enemy territory into regions where he has been rejected in the past in order to reach the unreachable he speaks to the death and their ears are opened to hear in him we behold the glory of the lord the majesty of our god jesus reaches out to the outsider gentiles the sick the unclean the lost even the dead and he brings them into his kingdom into his grace into his abundance the types of people we probably wouldn't want sitting next to us in church sorry you're just there it's just no are the kinds of people jesus has come to reach and to bring into his kingdom the next five scenes are going to be so quick you guys i promise in scene two soon after this jesus feeds four thousand gentiles the same way he fed five thousand jews only two chapters ago we're told in verse six that jesus gives thanks and he breaks the bread and he distributes it that word for give thanks is the greek word eucharist which christians use even today to refer to the lord's supper or holy communion so this scene of providing bread to a crowd is a foreshadow of the lord's supper it's anticipating jesus last supper where he will offer himself to nourish and save the souls and bodies of sinners who repent and believe in him he provides for us out of himself out of his life out of his abundance and his mercy it gives us a picture of the kingdom of heaven in him as isaiah prophesied the majesty of the lord is on full display the glory of god is revealed and again notice it's to people who you would least expect to receive god's grace gentiles people outside god's people scene three jesus returns to galilee and he's confronted by the pharisees who come out to do battle with him the contrast now between the pharisees and the gentile crowd could not be more extreme the gentiles stayed with jesus for three days feeding on his words and his abundance and his grace it's a picture of belief well the pharisees now in contrast refused to believe and come out looking for a fight demanding a sign a supernatural showing to prove jesus credentials jesus refuses because you don't enter god's kingdom by signs by magic tricks but by faith in jesus as god's king and god's son we cannot command jesus to do our bidding to prove his credentials what is needed is faith in him again what's astounding in our text is the people you expect to believe in jesus his family the religious leaders the bible experts the jewish political leaders all of those people reject him the people we assume are insiders cast jesus out at the same time we find all these outsiders in mark's gospel and they're the ones who believe the sick the lame the deaf the mute the blind gentiles tax collectors sinners the uneducated the disadvantaged people who we expect to be enemies of god jesus reaches out to and they receive him so where do you stand who do you say that he is will you repent and believe or oppose and reject our text demands an answer scene four jesus leaves the pharisees and in a boat jesus followers realize they've forgotten their lunch they have only one loaf of bread between them jesus is concerned not for the disciples physical need but their spiritual state the spiritual blindness and the disbelief of jesus own followers is revealed on the boat the disciples are worried they forgot to bring lunch they only have one loaf of bread but jesus is not constrained by physical limitations he's not concerned about what's for lunch he's concerned about belief he says in mark 8 verse 15 watch out beware of the leaven of the pharisees and the leaven of herod jesus is worried about the disciples faith or their lack thereof the leaven of the pharisees and herod is the their rejection of jesus their opposition to him their hard-heartedness which prevents them from receiving him as god's king and god's son the yeast of the pharisees and the yeast of herod is a sinful hardness of heart which fails to recognize who jesus is and it contaminates every aspect of your life it's spiritual deafness blindness spiritual starvation from focusing solely on worldly things and failing to be fed spiritually the disciples here have no idea what jesus is talking about they aren't worried about their spiritual state but about their empty stomachs their lack of belief is astounding as if they're completely deaf and blind to what's happening all around them jesus repeatedly uses sight language to highlight their blindness in verse 15 he says watch out in verse 18 having eyes do you not see the disciples are failing to understand who jesus is they don't see him they're leaning toward unbelief and rejection of jesus they're blind to who he is the worries of the world are choking their faith this theme of blindness leads into the next scene in mark 8 verse 22 they come to bethsaida and a blind man's now brought to jesus and jesus is begged to touch

him jewish people worried that touching something unclean would make you unclean touching something dirty or sick would make you dirty or sick we feel the same way have you ever had someone sneeze on their hand and then try to shake yours this isn't foreign to us we understand this well jesus power we see works the opposite way anyone who is touched by jesus is made clean no matter how dirty or sick you are his touch transforms you makes you holy you receive his life and healing and he removes your sin and shame and sickness now it's interesting about this healing it's the only place in the whole bible this happens is the healing happens in two steps jesus first touches the man and the man receives partial sight not complete sight jesus needs to touch him again a second time for the man to receive full sight why isn't jesus powerful enough to just heal this guy why does this first healing attempt not work i think this two-part healing is explained by looking at the context remember what happens before and what happens after this scene this healing is like a parable it's a metaphor for the disciples spiritual blindness the disciples have a partial sight of who jesus is but it's not a complete sight even though they have seen firsthand all that jesus has done they still do not see who he is they have some faith but not a full faith the disciples haven't landed in either camp of unbelief or belief and yet they're on the fence and they need to decide to have faith or to walk away this astounds me you'd think surely anyone who was physically with jesus when he was doing all this stuff would believe in him well the gospels repeatedly show that isn't the case spiritual blindness spiritual deafness prevents belief even if god himself is standing right in front of you what is needed for faith is for christ to reach out and touch a person that they may see that they may hear that they may be fed and believe the disciples partial sight is highlight in the final scene of our text jesus is walking with his disciples and here is the moment he turns to them and he asks but who do you say that i am and peter answers immediately you are the christ peter finally sees jesus is god's king he brings the kingdom of heaven to earth after peter sees that jesus is god's king jesus now describes what the christ must do the [23 : 43] christ is not coming to jerusalem to be coronated but to be killed he will suffer and be rejected by the leaders of israel he'll be murdered but after three days he will rise again this is not what peter or anyone was expecting god's king was supposed to establish god's kingdom on earth not die at the hands of god's people so peter rebukes jesus which is the same language we've read when jesus confronts demons it's as though peter thinks now that jesus has a demon but of course it's peter who's wrong and who is rebuked unknowingly by rebuking jesus peter shows that he is seeking not the will of god but the will of the devil see peter's vision here is only partial he must journey to jerusalem to see fully who jesus is and why he has come he must see that jesus has to go to jerusalem to die that's why he's come this is how the kingdom of god will fill the earth jesus must give himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world and in laying down his life defeat death and the devil forever by submitting to death he'll take away the power of death over us he'll defeat death by substituting himself to bear the punishment for our sin and this will free us from our sin from being enslaved to sin and destined to die his death is what will win our eternal life we see the kingdom is going to come through the cross so who is jesus six scenes belief or unbelief you must now decide will you turn away or will you believe come and behold him let his word break through your spiritual deafness and his glory radiate through your blindness may you receive him as god's king and god's son may you repent and believe and follow him as his kingdom comes amen