

Mark 8:1-26 (NLT)

The Gospel of Mark Jesus And the Kingdom Vision

Introduction: Mark is written for disciples. It's a road map for discipleship to Jesus. So in a time where there is a lot of confusion about what's going on, who we are and what we are to be doing - Mark's gospel is a road map for the people of God in how to follow the way of Jesus.

Mark is also a book of mystery - Mark's Gospel is so filled with mysterious references to Jesus and his identity. Mark, though rarely quoting the OT, is a master of the Biblical text and has told the story of how God is cryptically and mysteriously present and bringing his kingdom on earth through the suffering, crucified and resurrected messiah, Jesus.

"For Mark, the character of God's presence in Jesus is a mystery that can be approached only by indirection, through riddle like allusions to the Old Testament." - Richard Hays

Mark through his portrayal of Jesus is provoking the most important question that has ever been put to humanity, who is Jesus?

On a cursory reading of Mark chapter 8 these all seem to be fragmented stories of what happened. But as we'll see, Mark has joined these stories together and told them in such a way to tell us something about Jesus and what it means to be his disciples.

As we've noted Mark's Jesus speaks cryptically and mysteriously on purpose because he wants us to press into his story of Jesus so we don't miss what God is doing, so we don't miss how God is bringing his kingdom into this world and how we get to be a part of that kingdom.

1. The feeding of the multitudes and the dullness of disciples

- a. **“When again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat....How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?”** The author and audience recognize the repeated event. Why don't the disciples? Mark wants to show us here in this passage, and actually starting back with the feeding of the 5,000 (Mark 6:30) that it is the disciples that are dull of sight and slow of heart. The disciples need healing of their hearts, opening of their sight and clarity about what it means to follow Jesus... which will lead into the next section (8:27-38) with Peter's declaration and correction about the way of Jesus being the way of the cross.

2. The Pharisees and their blindness

- a. **“The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him. And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, “Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation.” And he left them, got into the boat again, and went to the other side.”**
 - i. *“Jesus' refusal to give a sign to the Pharisees must be read in the overall context and narrative of Mark, which is filled with miraculous signs indicating God's favor upon Jesus. The refusal is therefore filled with irony from Mark's standpoint. Jesus refuses to give them the very thing that God has been abundantly doing through him all along and that they are too blind to see.” - Larry Hurtado*
 - ii. Jesus refers to the religious leaders as “this generation” harkening us or hyperlinking us back to Psalm 95 and the story of the children of Israel coming out of Egypt (Exodus 17) They saw God's signs and wonders, experienced his salvation from Egypt, and yet they continually doubted and challenged whether God was really among them. The Psalm reads, **“Today, if only you would hear his voice, “Do not harden your hearts as**

you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the wilderness, where your ancestors tested me; they tried me, though they had seen what I did. For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, 'They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways.' So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'” - Psalm 95:8-10

- iii. Here we can see Mark's 'who is Jesus' moment in this text. Who is Jesus? Jesus is that very same God, the God of the Exodus, present now, clearly showing his power and presence among the people of Israel - with many signs and wonders, bread from heaven, the power over the waters, life over death, healings and exorcisms, and yet the religious leaders, like ancient Israel have seen all of this and yet say, Show us a sign from heaven, or like ancient Israel question, "Is God really among us?" The sign from heaven, God himself, is standing right before them and they are completely blind to him and his presence. None are so blind as those who refuse to see.

3. The Warning to Disciples (vs.14-21)

- a. Immediately after when Jesus is alone with his disciples, he strictly warns them - Watch out! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod. But the disciples are thoroughly confused and think Jesus is mad that they didn't bring bread. But Jesus isn't talking about bread he's talking about the Pharisees and Herod which are two very different groups but are united in their opposition to Jesus, his message and demonstration of God's kingdom... and even plot together how to destroy him (Mark 3:6)
- b. Jesus is a bit exasperated with the disciples here - Why are you talking about bread?! **Do you not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes do**

you not see and having ears do you not hear? and do you not remember?

- i. Jesus' questions to the disciples hyperlink to Jeremiah 5:21(20-31). This isn't just a poetic way of saying, 'I can't believe how blind you are'. It's a way of saying, "Look out! You're in danger of going the way of the Israelites of Jeremiah's day. And you know what happened to them! They lost the kingdom!! Like the Pharisees and Herod the people then were caught up with their own concerns, their way of life. The rich were comfortable, and so unconcerned about injustice and wickedness in their society. The poor, the fatherless, the widow and the foreigner were being oppressed and perishing. The people of Israel only cared for themselves and not for others, they had forgotten that God had called them to be his people of righteousness and justice. He was the God of the Nations, the God of Mercy and justice, the God of the poor, the fatherless, the widow and the foreigner..
- ii. The ancient people of Israel had adopted alternative kingdom visions, they were blind and hardhearted to the ways of God...just as they were in Jesus' day.
- iii. Jesus says to disciples, "Beware of the leaven or yeast of the Pharisees and Herod." - What does this mean? Leaven is most often used in scripture to show the permeating and destructive nature of evil, of false teaching, and hypocrisy. In Matthew's Gospel this same teaching is used to warn disciples and the crowds against the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. But in the context of Mark it would seem that what Jesus is talking about is the Pharisees and Herod's wrong view and understanding of the Kingdom of God. They have false, and skewed versions of God's kingdom and they clearly oppose Jesus the King. They have their own versions of

what the Messianic kingdom looks like and how it comes and Jesus doesn't fit it.

- 1.** We've seen already that the religious leaders do not like Jesus' version of the Kingdom of God - He isn't talking about their politics and hostile takeovers; He's plundering the kingdom of darkness and talking about the kingdom of God being like seed. He isn't keeping up with their beloved traditions; he's purposely going against them. He isn't giving honor and care to the religious system and leaders of the day; He's giving it to the poor, the possessed, the disenfranchised and outcasts, the gentile, the tax collector and the prostitute.
- 2.** As we've seen the religious leaders want a Jewish kingdom of God that benefits the Jews only. One that upholds the law and their traditions with great strictness. They care nothing for the broader community that Jesus has been serving and teaching. This is Tribal Kingdom. The kingdom, the blessings and the benefits are for my people, my political party, my neighborhood, my religious group, etc. But as we've seen this is not Jesus' gospel and his kingdom - we must beware of any tribalism, any view of the kingdom or the gospel that turns people into enemies based on tribe, culture, politics, etc.
- 3.** Herod is a bit different. His Kingdom vision is about his dynasty - as we've seen his kingdom is completely for himself, his own comfort, benefit, glory, power, pleasure - Herod is a hedonist. He represents the one who is only concerned for themselves, their benefit, and comfort. This is also a warning, equally as applicable as the first - the kingdom of God is not about me. It's not about my comfort, my success, my power, my fame. It's

about Jesus, about who he is and what he has done. ME? I have been graciously rescued by him, and my life is wrapped up in being his disciple learning to follow Jesus in the way of the cross and onto resurrection, not following culture in the way to selfish ambition and vain glory.

a. *“The church is elected to responsibility, called to be the church to and for the world - not in order to save it or conquer it or even transform it, but to serve it by showing what redeemed human community and culture look like, as modeled by the One whose cultural work led him to the cross. In short, were sent out to be martyrs, witnesses of the crucified one. In that way, we win by losing. - Craig Hovey*

b. Church, we need to take Jesus’ warning to heart - Beware of alternative versions of the Gospel and the Kingdom of God, they are many and they are dangerous.

4. We are really not much different from the Pharisees or Herod. We create our own versions of what the kingdom of God, God’s presence, grace and blessing over our lives should look like - But it’s strange because many times it looks nothing like the life of Jesus - his character, his love, his faithfulness, his presence, the company that he keeps, his power, his suffering, his joy...

a. *“The choice for the church in every age will always be, Will our identity be shaped by Scripture or by our culture—by the biblical story or the cultural story?” - Lesslie Newbigin*

5. If we are disillusioned with, or even blind to the way God is working in the world it might have more to do with our own agendas and perspectives that we

bring upon scripture - Trying to mold Jesus and the kingdom into our image - or How we think the kingdom does come or should come. What do we need and how can we avoid this mistake, this blindness to God's kingdom and presence in our midst? How do we guard against what Jesus warns here? We need to lean all the more into Jesus, the gospel and scripture to see how God is at work in ways we might miss. Which leads right into our final story..

4. Through Jesus' healing touch we see Everything
 - a. I'm going to read this last section from the ESV because I believe it's translation truly captures Mark's message.
 - b. **“And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, “Do you see anything?” And he looked up and said, “I see people, but they look like trees, walking.” Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. And he sent him to his home, saying, “Do not even enter the village.”**
 - i. This section works as a parabolic story of what Jesus is going to do for his own disciples and still offers to do for Disciples today. Right now they see him, but not clearly, they get him, but not fully. Jesus is going to heal their vision - so that they see Everything.
 1. In this story a blind man is taken by Jesus, by the hand, away from the crowd, outside of the village, and through Jesus' healing touch he is now able to see everything!
 2. A few weeks ago we saw how Jesus is the one who opens hearts to receive God's love and God's spirit.

But here we see that is Jesus that has come to open eyes to see the world and history as it truly is..

3. C.S. Lewis said, *"I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else."*
4. This is what Jesus wants to do for disciples. To be their vision, that he would be the definition of reality and meaning for us. That he would be for us - THE WAY, THE TRUTH, THE LIFE
5. Just like this man, we need Jesus, our Rabbi, to take us by the hand, to walk us away from the crowds/ outside of the village (other influences/ competing voices and visions) - to touch us and open our eyes so we can see everything!

Closing: The takeaway or challenge - Let the warning of Jesus your Rabbi sit with you. Take it to heart. Let his warning to beware of a competing vision for his kingdom sit with you this week, and allow his life, his teachings, his posture to wash over you anew to reshape your vision, and then to follow him in his kingdom mission...

Do we really understand what Jesus' kingdom mission was and is all about? Have we made that the goal and vision of our lives?

Do we understand not only what he is doing right now, in our lives and in our world?

What in our lives or in the church would make Jesus groan today, saying, you still don't get it?

Let's ask him to reveal those things to us, as we seek him.