

# Seeing Jesus and Following Jesus

Pastor Chris Baker //06.18.23 // Centralia FBC

Good morning, church! Our reading today begins in Mark 8:11. While you're turning there I want to take a couple of minutes to give you an update from the Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting this week. My family along with Jerry Patton and his two oldest sons were able to attend. We appreciate you sending us and we're excited about what God is doing in our convention.

I'll provide a more detailed review at our July members meeting, but there are three big picture things I wanted to bring to your attention.

The first, and the one that caught the most media attention, is that we solidified our commitment to a Biblical view of gender roles in church leadership. Southern Baptists have always held that the office and function of the pastor are limited to Biblically qualified men.

Both men and women are gifted for service in the church, but the office of that we at FBC call pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.

Southern Baptists have always broadly held that belief. It was challenged by Saddleback Church in California, the church where Rick Warren pastored for years. They very publicly ordained women as pastors a couple of years ago. Warren's church, along with one other were removed from the SBC this week.

We also approved a constitutional amendment that makes it even clearer that SBC churches do not believe it is biblical to call women into any form of pastoral ministry. That amendment will have to be approved again next year to take effect.

The second big thing is that our work to make SBC churches places where the vulnerable are safe and abusers are not continues. Last year, we appointed an Abuse Reform Implementation Task Force to create tools to help churches prevent abuse. One of their primary responsibilities was to build a web resource where churches can find the names of abusers who will not show up on a sex offender registry or criminal database. An absurdly low number of abuse cases are prosecuted or result in convictions. Therefore, a resource is needed to help churches avoid hiring those who hop from one church to another to avoid prosecution. Building a website like this is complicated legally, but the task force worked hard. The site is up and names will begin posting soon. We also disfellowshipped a church for knowingly employing a pastor with a history of abuse.

And third, just as a matter of prayer, we re-elected Dr. Bart Barber of FBC Farmersville, TX as our convention president. In addition to pastoring his church, he'll spend the next year continuing to lead and represent the SBC well. I hope you'll join me in praying for him.

Now, on to Mark. I want to thank Skyler for doing a great job handing the Word last week. I got to listen to that sermon while I was driving to New Orleans. I was blessed by it, and I hope you were as well.

We're going to start in Mark 8:11 and we'll read all the way to 9:29.

## **Read Mark 8:11-9:29**

### **Pray**

The Nobel Prize is one of the most prestigious awards in the world. Scientists have earned a Nobel Prize for discovering X-Rays, radiation and nuclear reactions, radio transmissions, theoretical physics, and a litany of other things I'll never understand.

And then, there's Konrad Lorenz. He was an Austrian scientist and he won't the Nobel Prize in 1973 for playing watching birds.

To be specific, he won for his work with geese. He was the first to write about a process called imprinting. In the first days of life, geese, ducks, and many other birds will have a metaphorical imprint of their mother and siblings stamped onto their brain. This imprint happens as soon as they're able to see and tells them who to follow.

(<https://sitn.hms.harvard.edu/flash/2017/getting-ducklings-row-look-inside-animal-mind-2/>)

Usually, the mother is the first thing the duckling sees, but Lorenz found out that it doesn't have to be. It turns out that birds aren't all that smart. So if a gosling first sees a red ball or a block, or even a scientist—they'll just start following it around as though it's their mother.

As soon as they learn to see, they learn to follow. Parents, how cool would it have been—how much easier would trips to the grocery store have been—if God just built that into our kids as well, amen?

Learning to see and learning to follow are two themes that Mark uses across these two chapters to illustrate something huge.

The peak of Mark's gospel is right in the middle of our passage today. Mark 8:29, Peter's confession of Jesus as Messiah, is the moment to which everything we've read so far points to and the moment which everything that comes after will flow from. This is the heart of Mark's gospel. And it happens in the midst of stories about seeing and following.

There are five scenes in our text. We won't spend a ton of time on any of them. Remember, we're doing a 16-week overview of Mark this summer. This isn't our typical expositional pace. These would all five be sermons normally and I'm going to refrain from preaching five sermons today, Lord willing.

In the first scene, Mark 8:11-26 the author shows us disciples learning to see.

### **Learning to see (8:11-26)**

The first folks who want to see are the Pharisees. They want to see a miracle. Earlier, they saw a miracle. Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath. Afterward, they decided they wanted to kill him. So they had already seen, but in seeing they hadn't believe. They didn't approach Jesus wanting to see who He is, they wanted to see what He could do.

Jesus doesn't give them the miracle they want. He rebukes them and gets back into the boat with His disciples. As they cross the lake again, they realize they didn't bring food. Jesus tries to make this a

teachable moment. Since food is on your mind, you know how bread is made. It's the leaven that makes it rise. You add just a little leaven and it works its way through the whole loaf. Don't let the thinking of the Pharisees work its way through you. Don't let thinking of the Pharisees imprint on you. Don't think of me as they do.

The disciples, though, don't catch this. No, verse 16: *They were discussing among themselves that they did not have any bread.* Sure, Jesus, whatever, we're hungry. Actually, the text doesn't even say we're hungry yet. But we're definitely going to be later.

You see, the disciples haven't really learned to see yet. They haven't really learned to see Jesus for who He is and let that imprint on everything about them. Can you tell me, church, what Jesus has already done with food in the disciples presence?

He fed thousands of people with a lunchable on multiple occasions. Jesus is trying to teach them a truth about the Kingdom and they're too worried about where their next meal is coming from to listen.

They don't understand yet. But they're about to.

The Pharisees should have seen Jesus for who He was. They didn't. The disciples were going to see Jesus for who He was, but they didn't really get it yet. His image hadn't fully imprinted on their hearts.

The Pharisees didn't get a miracle. The disciples didn't get to see Jesus multiply food again. But the next guy in the text? The one who was the least likely to see a miracle? The least likely to see anything, as a matter of fact. . .he gets the miracle.

They arrive in Bethsaida. It's a place they'd all been before. The people there bring a blind man to Him, and what did Jesus do? He doesn't just heal him. He heals him in stages. We don't get a direct explanation in the text, okay, so recognize that this part is my opinion. But I believe it fits really well within the context.

This is the only time in Mark that Jesus performs a miracle in two stages. He's the only one in this passage who is on the receiving end of a miracle from Jesus. And I think Jesus does it progressively to illustrate how we learn to see Him for who He really is. The disciples had followed Jesus, sure, but they weren't following Him on that day as fully or faithfully as they would in the days ahead.

The man's physical sight came back in stages, and as we take in this 16-week overview of Mark we see that the disciples' spiritual sight, the imprinting of Jesus on their heart as the one to follow, comes in stages as well. Not their salvation. They had already believed in Jesus Christ alone for salvation. Salvation doesn't come in pieces. But sanctification, growth in our faith, our discipleship is going to progress deeper and deeper as we follow.

Listen to Paul in 1 Corinthians 13: 12 ***For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, as I am fully known.***

The disciples were learning to see Jesus for who He truly is. We're learning the same thing. There will come a day where we see and reflect Him perfectly—but that's not today. Today, we're learning to see. And in the very next passage, in the heart of Mark's gospel we get the truth about Jesus put on fully

display for His disciples to see. It's by seeing Jesus for who His words finally imprint on their hearts in such a way they grow to follow Him.

### **Seeing to learn (8:27-33)**

In verse 27, Jesus asks who do they people say that I am. The disciples give various answers. In verse 29, He drills down deeper and asks the most important question any human being will ever answer.

Who do you say that I am? Who is Jesus to you? Peter gives the right answer. "You are the Messiah." That means you are the savior. That's the confession that saves. That's the confession, we learn in Matthew, upon which Jesus builds the church.

This is the gravitational center of Mark's gospel. The disciples are now on the same page in seeing Jesus for who He is.

Mark is writing to show us that Jesus is the Messiah who came to serve and to save and the most foundational component of that truth is that Jesus is the Messiah. To you, who is Jesus? That's the most important question you'll ever answer and that's the most important question of Mark's gospel. Peter answers correctly. How do you answer?

Peter said Jesus is the messiah. Messiah means savior and so answering that question rightly means you acknowledge that you need a savior.

We always want to make the gospel as clear as we can and the best way I know to do that is to use four words: God, Man, Christ, and Response.

Hear this especially if you are here and you know that you have never repented of your sins and placed your faith in Jesus Christ for salvation.

God is the creator of all things (Gen. 1:1). He is perfectly holy, worthy of all worship, and will punish sin.

God is good. God is holy. God is just. There is no fault in God.

When it comes to Man, though, we find a terrifying fault. All people, though created good, have become sinful by nature. From birth, all people are alienated from God, hostile to God, and subject to the wrath of God.

Romans 3:23 - For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Enter Christ. Jesus Christ, who is fully God and fully man, lived a sinless life, died on the cross to bear God's wrath in the place of all who would believe in him, and rose from the grave in order to give his people eternal life.

2 Cor. 5:21 - He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Knowledge of that truth requires a response. God calls everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and trust in Christ in order to be saved.

Romans 10:13 For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

If you haven't trusted Christ, today—right now—admit to God you're a sinner, commit to turning away from your sin and place your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior and you, like Peter, will answer that question in the only way that leads to salvation.

You can do that right now silently at your seat, but I want you to let me or someone else in this room know that later so we can come alongside and help you know what it means to walk with Christ. Because it doesn't stop with the confession. Trusting Christ is not the end, it's the beginning of a relationship that will see Him as Lord of your life.

Peter gives the greatest answer of his life and the worst within moments of each other in the text.

Now that the right reality about Jesus had imprinted on the disciples, Jesus begins in verse 31 to teach what that truly means. He's going to suffer.

Peter thinks he knows better. Jesus, I know you're the Messiah, but I think I have a better idea about how to live. I think I have a better plan.

Church, you are not committed to the Jesus Christ as Lord if you're not also committed to following His plan for your life. That's immediately where Jesus goes in verse 34. You've seen me for who I am, now hear what it means to follow me.

### **Learning to follow (8:34-38)**

Learning to follow means three things: self-denial, give up faith in everything else, and be obedient.

Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Me.

Number one, let's take a look at self-denial. It's a really strong expression in the original language, and this is where it all starts.

The meaning of the phrase is really to disown someone. To refuse to associate with them.

So, what you're saying is, I no longer want to be associated with the person I am. I realize I'm a sinner. I realize I can't earn salvation. I give up on my own efforts. I give up on the idea that I can be good enough for God to accept me, which is what dominated Judaism in Jesus's day and it's the key theme of all world religions apart from Christ. I give up on all my self-effort. I give up on relying on myself. But it's more than that. I give up on my own will; I give up on my own ambitions, my own plans.

And in the place of my ambitions, I substitute cross-bearing.

Jesus hadn't told his disciples yet that he would be crucified. So, they didn't know that was the death that awaited Jesus, but they did know about crucifixion. The Romans crucified thousands, and they would display the victims along the roads for everyone to see. It was a terrible and painful way to die.

When Jesus talked about taking up the cross, the disciples would have thought about the victims they had seen being crucified. Those victims had to carry their own cross to the place of execution. It was a sign of suffering and death. Jesus was telling his disciples that if they wanted to follow him, they would face suffering and even death. And that's what happened to most of the disciples. They were persecuted

for their faith, and many of them were even martyred. They were willing to endure all that because they believed in Jesus and the salvation he offered.

So, when Jesus talks about taking up your cross, he is asking if you are willing to face persecution and even give up your life for your faith. It's about how much you value the gift of salvation that Jesus offers. It means being ready to endure whatever challenges come your way.

To see Jesus for who He is means that your life will exhibit a pattern of self-denial and willingness to bear the increased hardship that comes with being a Christian. Because self-denial and cross-bearing are features, not flaws, but features of following Jesus. Following is third thing in this section.

Follow me. It's a continuous action. So, "You deny yourself, take up your cross, and keep following Me" is the best direct translation of the words in the text. It means to copy. It's those goslings we talked about in the beginning. You see Jesus, you follow Jesus.

You try to be like Him. If you say you stay connected to Christ, as it says in 1 John 2:6, that we "should walk just as he walked." You want to be like Christ. Christ went obediently to the cross because He saw the good things that would come after the cross.

Our lives should be marked by obedience, that's what it means to follow. We obey the Word of God. We obey it with happiness, love, thankfulness, and willingly.

And here's where it gets tough, church. That's incredibly hard. And hard isn't what we'd choose. No sane parent has ever said, "I wish my children would misbehave," and there's never been a self-help book entitled How to Live an Unhappy Life. We all want blessings, happiness, and fulfillment, and we associate a happy condition with a certain amount of ease.

(<https://www.gotquestions.org/following-Christ.html>)

Jesus promises blessing and fulfillment to those who follow Him (John 4:14), but those promises are not fully realized until eternity. And we get a reminder of that, actually we get a promise of that, in the next section.

### **Learning to see the goal (9:1-13)**

Life was about to get hard for the disciples. They needed to be strong and have endurance to get through.

So Jesus gives them a miraculous affirmation—the most amazing miracle in my view that we see until the resurrection.

Jesus took Peter, James, and John to a high mountain by themselves. Suddenly, He was transformed before their eyes. His clothes became incredibly bright and white, brighter than anything on Earth. Then, Elijah and Moses appeared and started talking with Jesus.

Peter was so amazed that he didn't know what to say, so naturally he started talking. He proposed building three altars.

But before he could say much, a cloud covered them, and a voice came from the cloud saying, "This is my beloved Son, listen to Him." When they looked around, they only saw Jesus.

We call this moment the transfiguration and it happens to give Peter, James, and John a confident assurance that Jesus is God. During the difficult times and suffering, there would be something amazing to look back on.

From this point forward in Mark's gospel, Jesus will be pressing onward toward the cross. Onward toward suffering, onward toward hardship. And after the crucifixion and resurrection, the disciples lives would get harder, not easier. But they always have this moment to remember. They have the past vision of what is really a future glory to remind them that the suffering is worth it. The hardship is worth it because of who we're following.

Paul said it well to the church at Corinth: *For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory.* (2 Cor 4:17)

This is a crucial moment in Mark's gospel. It was a clear demonstration of who Jesus is. This is the greatest evidence pre-resurrection evidence that Jesus is God.

And as it always is, Jesus's timing was perfect. Because the disciples faith was about to be tested. Their faith in Jesus was about to be measured in practical terms.

### **Seeing faith in action (9:14-29)**

They leave the mountain in verse 13 and head back to the valley. Both literally and figuratively. That's no accident. We all have mountaintop experiences. Maybe it was at a revival or a camp or a mission trip or something like that. Really, there's a sense in which every Sunday morning church gathering should be a mini-mountaintop experience for you. And I hope that it is. Those things are good and they have their place, but the majority of the Christian life isn't lived on the mountaintop. It's lived in the valley.

Peter, James, and John go from mountaintop with Jesus in the presence of the father to the trouble and pain and confusion of the world.

Down in the valley below are the nine other apostles and perhaps some other assorted followers and disciples. And there's a large crowd gathered around them because the entourage of Jesus assumed that Jesus would be there. Whenever people saw Jesus' followers, they would assume He was there, and so the crowd begins to collect around the apostles even though He's not there.

And there was one in that crowd whose son Jesus's followers could not heal. They ask Him why, and Jesus responds rather harshly.

"You unbelieving generation!"

What was different? There was never a recorded instance of a demon that couldn't be cast out or an illness that couldn't be healed by the apostles before. Remember, Jesus deployed them to do just this work.

The issue here is faith applied. It's easy to have faith in Jesus when He's standing right there. But what does it look like when He's away? He was up the mountain. The disciples were in the valley.

Jesus gets frustrated with their lack of faith and asks them, "How long will I have to put up with you?" He is exasperated because they have so little faith.

The boy's father asks Jesus for help, but his statement shows weak faith. He says, "If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." Jesus is surprised by this lack of faith. He exclaims, "If I can? Are you kidding me?" He reminds the father that all things are possible for those who have faith.

Faith, in this sense, is trust in God's promises and the truth of His Word as found Scripture.

Jesus wants them to have faith in him and his ability to help.

Jesus heals the boy, and later, when they are alone, the disciples ask him why they couldn't do the same. Jesus tells them that this kind of miracle can only happen through prayer. They couldn't do it on their own strength or power.

Church, if we believe Jesus is the Messiah and if we're going to lead a life of self-denying, cross-bearing, obedience then we must walk in faith. We have to live our life in such a way that we trust Jesus is going to give us what we need to get by.

He said elsewhere even small amount of faith, like a mustard seed, can move mountains. It's not about the size of your faith, it's about the presence of your faith.

The blind man and this father are ones who receive the miracles in these two chapters. They had the least knowledge about Jesus of anyone. But they had faith.

One of the ways we demonstrate that faith is by prayer.

Jesus could have let them succeed without persistent faith or prayer, but that would have been a bad lesson. He wants them to learn that they need to depend on Him even when he's not physically present. The disciples are not learning how to perform miracles but how to rely on God's power and will through prayer.

A small amount of struggling faith can draw us closer to God.

If we believe Jesus is the Messiah, that truth will imprint on our hearts in such a way that we become self-denying, cross-bearing, obedient followers of Him. That takes faith. It takes trust. And it's supernatural. It's something that God does in us, so we fully rely on Him to make it happen.

Konrad Lorenz won a Nobel Prize for watching birds, but in doing so I think he revealed something about you and me. Geese are created to follow. They'll follow their mother, but if she's not present then they'll follow whatever is in front of them.

You were created to follow. You can either follow Jesus or follow your heart. They lead in opposite directions. Proverbs 14:12 *There is a way that seems right to a person, but its end is the way to death.*

Church, see Jesus for who He truly is. The Messiah who came to serve and to save. Entrust yourself to Him. Follow Him in faith that He'll deliver you in this life and the next. Let's pray.



