The Confession?

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Date: 18 June 2023

Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0:00] So, this morning for a little while, we're going to look back at the passage that we read together, Mark's Gospel chapter 8 from verse 27. It's the next section that we've come to. If you're visiting with us, we've been taking a slow journey through Mark's Gospel, and I hope enjoying doing so, as God has opened up and revealed to Himself to us in different ways.

There are Bibles at the side if you want to take Bibles, there's Bibles upstairs as well. That's on page 844 if you want to follow along with the reading today.
But what we have made clear, and if you have been here over a number of weeks and months, I think we've got to the stage where we know the author's intent, we know Mark's intent as he is writing this Gospel, is to give a really clear identity as to the person of Jesus so that everyone knows who Jesus is, and also what it means to be a disciple.
That's really the two big themes of Mark's Gospel, that we know who Jesus is and we know what it means to be a follower of Jesus, the disciple. It's very basic. It's very helpful if you're ever meeting with people who don't, aren't Christians, who maybe want to know more about the Christian faith. Going to Mark's Gospel is a great start because it speaks about Jesus and it speaks about following Him as disciples. And obviously that fundamental truth is critical for our eldership, for our leadership, for new elders, for the old elders, for the deacons, for everyone that's part of the congregation.
[1:30] Because our prayer life, our perspective when illness hits us, if we lose our jobs or when you go into the canteen at work, or you respond generally to life, will be governed, or your response will be governed by your understanding of Jesus Christ and my understanding of Jesus Christ, who He is and what it means to be a follower of Him.

There's nothing more practical. There's actually nothing more doctrinal in knowing these truths and putting them into practice. And as we've seen, I think as we study Mark's Gospel, we've seen that he's very thoughtful in how he introduces different aspects of Jesus' life and character.
And we've come, we're in the middle, we're right in the middle of the book, we're in the middle of the middle section of Mark's Gospel from chapter 8 verse 22. Right through to chapter 10 and verse 52 is a kind of middle section of the book.
And in this section, we find that Jesus is on the way. He's moving on. He's not staying in one place, but He's on the way, we're told in verse 27, on the way He asked His disciples.
And that's quite significant from Mark, the way He uses that language, because He uses it not just to talk geographically or about Christ's movements around Israel, but He's doing it because Christ is making His way somewhere from this point on.
[3:04] He's been going around the different areas of Judea and Sumeria, and now He's on His way. Where's He going? He's going to Jerusalem. That's the whole point of what Jesus, Mark is trying to remind us of here, that He's on the way to Jerusalem.

He's on the way to the cross. So every time you read that in this section, that Jesus was on His way. It's not just a random fact about His timetable. It's reminding us that He has a specific purpose to go to Jerusalem to die.
And so in this middle section, three times Jesus predicts His death and resurrection for the disciples. He's teaching them about what lies ahead.
There's a change of pace in this section. Not so many miracles, more direct teaching, more clear teaching, more teaching that's not in parables. And we're told that He says to them clearly that they, plainly, that they must know about this truth.
It's a critical section as He predicts His death and His resurrection in these sections to His disciples.

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[4:17] And that's because Mark knows exactly that the identity of Christ revolves around that fact and revolves around that truth. And also our understanding of discipleship revolves around knowing and appreciating crucified and risen Savior and the cost of discipleship to following Him.

So we find it's interesting, the early sections have been, Mark has been reflecting on Jesus and the people have been amazed at His power and His ability to calm the waves and to raise people from the dead and do remarkable miracles, great evidence of power.
But now Jesus is teaching about weakness. Not about power, He's speaking about death and He's speaking about suffering. And there's a whole change of direction as He blends these truths about Himself together and as Mark does that for us.
And it is also interesting, and we've seen this hunter mentioned it and Corey mentioned it the week before, that this section that we're looking at, not that we're looking at, this bigger section of which the bit that we're looking at is part and in the middle.
We're book-ended, the section is book-ended by two parables, sorry, two miracles of healing, a blind person.
[5:41] And it's as if Mark really wants to get across that point again and again. And we see it in the reaction of the disciples obviously as well, that there's an ongoing blindness and that Jesus has come to open people's eyes, not primarily not physically, although He does that in these miracles, but with that deeper parabolic truth of opening our eyes spiritually so we know and understand who Jesus is and who we are and what discipleship means.

In my new role, if God allows that to happen as a church planted in Leith, I've been rereading center church by Tim Keller.
And you know the phrase very well, but it just took me with a new sense of significance again in that recognition as disciples that I am more sinful and flawed than I ever dared believe and I'm more accepted and loved than I ever dared hope.
And that's really what Mark is wanting to get across in terms of discipleship here to his readers and to us. And we come to this powerful cameo right in the middle of the middle section with Jesus and his disciples and he's teaching them.
And as is often the case, the focus moves from Jesus and the disciples to Jesus and Peter who really in many ways is the spokesman, is the one with bravado, but the one also with insight.
[7:14] And we find this really interesting conversation between them where there's two questions, two answers, three rebukes and a divine insult.

So it's a small section, but it's packed with really interesting information and truth for us. And Jesus begins by asking the question, who do people say that I am?
And he's wanting to find out what the disciples know about those around him and what the general opinion is of Jesus. Unlike the Pharisees who want him dead and the political leaders who are afraid of Jesus, the opinion of the people is generally positive towards Jesus.
It's not right, but it's generally positive. They recognize he's someone different. They recognize probably that he is the spirit of the prophets in him, some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others one of the prophets.
They recognize him as someone sent from God with the resurrected spirits of the great prophets of old, but they don't really understand who he is.
[8:26] So Jesus asks a second question and moves from the general to the specific. That's a great question, but who do you say that I am?

Who do you say that I am? And Peter answers, you're the Christ. And he strictly charged them to tell no one about that. So Jesus cuts to the chase here with the disciples.
He's wanting to teach them. He's wanting to speak to them. He's wanting to declare truth to them. And he's absolutely emphatic, and he says, what about you? Who do you say that I am?
Because that's the question that he wants them to answer, to come to that understanding of who Jesus Christ is. And Peter articulates something that's different from the crowds.
He doesn't say he's John the Baptist or that he's Elijah or Moses. He says, you are the Messiah. You are the Christ. You're the anointed one. You're the Son of God.
[9:28] You're the long-awaited Savior of prophecy. And I was like, what a great answer. What a great insight, what great understanding.

And Jesus commends him for that, not in the passage we read, but in the parallel passage in Matthew, Jesus says to him, Peter, it is God who's revealed that to you.

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That's a revelation from God, and on Peter on this rock, I will build my church. And it's a turning point in the gospels, because it's his first declaration of understanding from the disciples as to who Jesus was, who Jesus is.
And yet, we are introduced to a great gulf in their understanding as to what kind of Messiah they were expecting and looking for and hoping for.
In blessing Peter, Jesus is recorded by Matthew. I'm wondering if it's left out by Mark, because Peter most likely was Mark's source for information.
[10:43] And maybe Peter didn't speak to Mark and tell him about the blessing, but he was more concerned that people would understand that he didn't get things quite right, because Jesus goes on to drop a bombshell.

The first rebuke from Jesus is, He strictly charged them or told them, it's the same word, it's the same word that's used for the rebuke earlier on.
He rebuked them, there's an element of rebuke in what he says, not to tell anyone about him. He strictly charged them, and it's the same word that's used throughout this whole passage about rebuking.
There was a sternness about what Jesus says, and that's because he knew that they didn't fully understand what it meant for to claim Jesus as the Messiah, to claim Him as the Christ.
He knew it was only their first step. They had their own ideas of a victorious king, a physical king, a king on the throne of David, a king who would push out the Roman Empire and would introduce this new kingdom here on earth.
[11:57] But their understanding had to be turned upside down. Jesus didn't want them to spread their misunderstanding of the Messiah, of the Christ to everyone around about them.

That would have caused great problems and great difficulties, so he tells them, don't speak to anyone about what I've said. He rebukes them sternly. It's such a strange thing, isn't it, you think? When Peter's just made this great declaration and Jesus says, okay, yeah, don't tell anyone about it. But then we come to a second rebuke.
And astonishingly, the second rebuke is from Peter. It isn't from Jesus, it's from Peter. As we go on, Jesus began plainly to teach them about his suffering, his rejection, his murder, and his resurrection.
He said this plainly, and then we're told, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. Can you imagine the Christ, the Son of God?
[12:59] Peter, come on, Jesus, come away here. What are you talking about? Who are you? What are you... Who do we see in things like that? That's ridiculous. Come on.

And he rebukes them like he's a little child, like he said the wrong thing. Peter says that to Jesus Christ. I don't think he even gets the chance to finish it. We're just told he began to rebuke him.
And he misunderstood entirely that following Jesus and following Jesus' life and death would mean suffering, would mean death, and would mean resurrection.
And Jesus goes on to explain that this must... Isn't that interesting? There's a real imperative there. He says he must suffer these things.
It's not just, oh, I know the future, and by the way, I'm going to get killed. They're going to take me away. He said, no, I'm on the way. I'm on the way. I must suffer.
[14:02] This is part of... This is everything that I'm here to do. He spoke plainly, and Peter thought better of him. He usurped Christ, rebuked him.

You're mad Christ. What are you saying? I know better. You're talking nonsense. And then we come to the third rebuke, same word.
She's all the way through. And it's Jesus' rebuke of Peter and of the disciples. Turning aside, seeing the disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, Get behind me Satan, this is the divine insult, for you're not setting your mind on the things of God but the things of man.
He's speaking to them all, but it's really Peter that's exposed here. And it's a brutal what he says to Peter. And Peter couldn't believe that he was being accused of being a disciple of Satan and using such strong language.
But Jesus just interjects so quickly before Peter's even finished giving the rebuke and says, Look, he nails him, stone dead. And there's a humbling of Peter at that point.
[15:16] And Jesus once said, Look Peter, look Peter, there's a spiritual war here. And you're speaking words of darkness and temptation.

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And you're revealing a deep ignorance of God and of His purposes which are diametrically opposed to a human way of thinking about messiahship and hero worship and hope and future and life.
And I'm sure the urgency with which Jesus spoke speaks into a sense of the temptation that was being offered to Him not to go on the way.
We'd seen it before. And we knew it was attributed to the darkness of Satan. And here we see, he sees it again. And he wants to crush it and quell it completely and utterly.
He is not going to lose sight of going on the way. And it's such a deep reminder to us of the truth for us of the necessity of the cross, the way of the cross, it is not just theology.
[16:31] It is much more than just philosophical truth or theological insight. It is an imperative must for the salvation of any human being.

For Christ, the divine man, it was the way of love. And it wasn't up for discussion. It wasn't up for coming and going.
It wasn't up for debate. And it's really second John all over again. We've been looking at second John in the evening worship and how determined John was to make sure that the early church, the early house churches didn't get misled by false teachers who said you could go another way.
It could be easier. You don't need to suffer. You just need that deep insight and live any old way you want. And you don't need to worry about loving God or loving others. And it's, these guys, it was imperative for them.
And it was imperative for John how much more so for Jesus. So briefly, can we just think about one or two lessons? There's much more in this than we can share today.
[17:37] I think the first thing, and it's going back to Jesus' earlier interaction with the disciples in the bit we read, questions are great. They reveal so much about people.

And Jesus often used questions in his interactions, both with his disciples and with those who were inquiring about faith in him.
And so as you go from here and as you live out your faith as a Christian, remember it's a great diagnostic aid, a great intentional aid that you can use in your evangelism.
Very often we're concerned about splurging out as much of the truth as we can, getting out of the gospel to people, and yet sometimes the way hasn't been prepared because we haven't asked the questions that will open up their interest and their questioning themselves.
We don't know where they're coming from. We don't know what they think. And so it's a great thing to ask questions. What do people think about Jesus? What do you think about Jesus? And find out what they know and find out what they think so that we can begin to realign potentially they're thinking towards what Jesus says about himself.
[18:51] Because many will similarly say what the crowd said then, that Jesus is a good man, that is probably a prophet, that is definitely from God.

And that that might be nice and comfortable, but it leaves people as part of a crowd. There's no personal challenge to that kind of understanding of Jesus Christ.
So Jesus will always take it from the general to the specific. What do you think? What do I think? And that's a great question to ask ourselves. It's the billion dollar question for us.
Every one of us, because our eternal destiny depends on recognizing and understanding and putting our trust in Jesus Christ. Such a big question and such a good question to ask people.
But you know, maybe what do other people say? What do your friends say? What do they say at the university? What do they say in the workplace? But then, what do you say? It's such an important emphasis.
[19:56] Because Jesus requires us to have a personal understanding that will always set us apart from the crowd. It will always do that. Because nobody generally says, oh, he's the living God.

He's worthy of my worship. I'll fall on my knees before him. And so if we understand who Christ is, and if we set Him apart as Lord, then it will set us apart from others.
So questions are great, both diagnostically for ourselves and also for other people. Secondly, I think this is very important, understanding Christ takes time.
You maybe became a Christian 30 years ago. That was only the beginning of the journey. The older I get as a Christian, actually I feel the less that I know.
Remember the emphasis on this middle section of Mark on blindness? That is absolutely, absolutely, fundamentally a brilliant insight into humanity.

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[21:03] That we need Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit every single day to open our eyes, because it's not simply a philosophical choice of how to live, or a moralistic way of living, or a philosophical mindset.

It is that we are spiritually blind and selfish and greedy and self-centered every moment of the day, and we don't recognize His grace. We don't value His grace.
We don't see how much we need His grace, and we are often self-reliant by our prayerlessness.
But I don't want to discourage you with that.
I want to encourage you that we're learning all the time. If we have faith as small as a mustard seed, we're accepted by Jesus, because it is Him who's working in our hearts.
It's God who will keep you. It's God who's teaching you. All we're asked to do is to go back to Him with our ignorance and with our blindness and ask Him to give us sight. And Peter's response, I think, revealed his heart, and it was a huge teaching moment for him.
[22:16] And for us, you're the Christ. Bang! I think he was expecting some sweets, because he was top of the class. He got the answer right. You know, like the kids in the kids' church, when you ask a question, and the answer's always Jesus.

It doesn't matter what it is. The answer's always Jesus, isn't it, because you're bound to be right that way. Well, it's a bit like that, maybe. Maybe that's been harsh on Peter. No, it has been harsh on Peter.
And it shouldn't say that. He had that understanding, and he was bold, and he did need humbled. We know that from the rest of his biography.
But he was the Lord's, and Jesus was his Savior. But when we take Jesus as our Savior, it turns everything we believe about God upside down.
And it turns our life upside down. And it turns our perspective upside down. It's not just something that we walk along life's journey with.
[23:17] It's something that's an utter and complete revolution and earthquake into who we are and what we understand. And I think the key of this passage in many ways is understanding our tendency to blindness, to being deceived, or to think in a way, and it sounds very harsh, but to think in a way that it's doing Satan's work for him.

I think that's what Jesus was trying to get across to Peter. He was thinking not in a godly way, and not in a Christ-centered way, and so really doing Satan's work for him.
And we have to ask sometimes the question, whose agenda are we furthering by relegating Jesus to a big part of our lives?
Because there's always the third lesson, I think, among many, the danger of thinking we know better than Jesus. That's, I think, an indication sometimes of the blindness in our hearts.
Just like Peter took Jesus aside, rebuked him. Do we do that? Maybe not intentionally, maybe not deliberately, and we don't have Jesus to grab by the arm, but metaphorically do we pull him aside and say, Jesus, I think I know better here.
[24:38] I think I know you better than you know yourself. I really think, I don't really think my sin's that bad. I don't think you're guiding me very well in life.

I don't think the experiences I'm going through really are fair. You should deal with them, Jesus, taking them aside and saying, really, we know better.
And yet a paradoxical truth within that for me is that if you've never rebuked Jesus or struggled with the truth of providence or what's happening in your life, you've probably still never understood your heart.
And you've never understood that this is a likely reality for us that we rebuke Jesus because we think we know better. And at least when we do that, let's have the recognition that we need forgiveness and we need our blind eyes to be opened.
We need to grasp a suffering Savior, and we need to grasp the reality that if we are to follow Jesus, we will suffer as those who are dealing with our own stubborn hearts and our own sinful hearts, and that remains entirely non-negotiable.
[26:04] So as we close for the elders, for the spiritual leaders, for those who will be overseeing and are overseeing their spiritual health of this congregation, keep these truths absolutely central.

We don't graduate from them. We don't become more sophisticated and move away from them. We live out His loving, sacrificial love for people.

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We do what we're called to do and humble dependence upon the living God. And we seek this congregation, this family of God's people to be a place of truth, a place of love, a place of grace, a place of forgiveness, place of life, place of hope, of celebration, of prayerful humility, and an invitational heart to bring others into the community to hear about the suffering Savior who went on His way, all the way to the cross, and who loves them all the way to the cross, and who took that same terminology upon himself and said, I am the way, the truth in the life.
No one comes to the Father except through me. May that be our experience. May that be our ongoing learning. May we recognize what Mark is saying, that as disciples, we always, we're not like drivers who pass their test and throw away the railplates.
We're always learners. We're always dependent. We're always followers. And He's the greatest one to follow. Always. He's always perfect and He's always right and He's always gracious and loving, even when we don't understand it, even when we pray prayers of asking, what on earth is going on, Father?
[27:59] Let's pray. Father God, we ask and pray for Your grace and for Your goodness to us, to be more and more evident. We thank You for Your outstanding patience with the disciples who though they heard plainly from Your mouth, that You were to suffer and die at the hands of Your enemies and then be raised.

Not only did they not hear the death, but they didn't hear the resurrection, but either. And forgive us, Lord, when we are like them with all the more knowledge and the more complete understanding that we have from a finished scripture of the word incarnate.
We thank You. We are forever indebted to You for Your patience. And we ask for a sense of forgiveness.
We pray for a sense of dependence on You for Your forgiveness and yet a great, great joy and desire to follow You for the life-giving reality of who You are and simply because we were created so to do.
So help us and bless us and bless now as we move in towards the ordination. May Your Spirit be with us for these few moments together also. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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