

95-07-30Mark

Before you, formally as we do on this day with our fellow believers and through fellowship with songs and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord, we're so grateful for our salvation. We're so grateful for our Savior, Jesus Christ, not only for the wonderful example that He set as He lived among us here on earth for some thirty-three years and demonstrated the compassion and the grace that are the full embodiment of Your Deity, but He also demonstrated Your love for us in sacrificing Himself and enduring the death, even the death of the cross with all of its humiliation and its shame, and He did so out of love for us when we were hopeless and helpless and useless and had no redeeming qualities. Jesus Christ died for us, and because of His death, because of the righteousness and the eternal life that come to us through Him, we stand before You this morning as Your children.

We look forward to a bright future and also to a wonderful life here in time. We pray now that as we look into the truth of Your Word that You will be with us. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will minister these things to our hearts.

We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen. We have been following the career, the ministry of Jesus Christ in the Gospel of Mark. We have gotten roughly halfway through the book, we're up to chapter 8. We've been going in some detail and seeing the episodes that made up that ministry that have been recorded by Mark.

We know that Mark recorded the observations of Peter who was an eyewitness of these things. We're going to step back this morning and take a little bit broader view of where we are in the ministry of Jesus Christ. I think it will illuminate some of the episodes that we've become familiar with, and we'll find out answers to the question, why? As we look at the miracles that Jesus did, the places where He went, and the people with whom He interacted at this particular point in His ministry.

We sometimes just take it for granted that there was some plan perhaps known only to God that arranged these things, and that's why Jesus went to one city at one time and another city at another. Hopefully this morning as we look at this we're going to provide ourselves with a framework to fit many of the things that Jesus did in the remainder of His ministry into a context that's meaningful to us. Now we know that Jesus fed the 5,000.

We know that He crossed the sea. We know that He came back after people had tried to make Him king, and He did some teaching. He was asked by Pharisees that came up from Jerusalem, why do your disciples act the way they do? We don't think they conform to our traditions.

We're used to doing things a certain way. We don't pick grain on the Sabbath. If we're going to sit down and eat a meal, we wash our hands with a ceremonial ritual.

It's not just cleanliness, it's a religious observance. Sort of like in our day, we generally sit down

and say grace. We ask God's blessing on the food before we eat.

Well, so the Pharisees, they added a hand washing ritual. Not only that, but they would wash their cup. You might invite some Pharisees over to dinner, and they'd come to your house and recline at the table, and you'd have the dishes set out there, and there would be a special ceremony where you would take those cups and saucers and dip them in water and ceremonially cleanse them before you partook of the meal.

This was just a part of their custom and a part of their ritual. Nothing evil, nothing satanic, nothing sinful in that. It was just a ritual.

Originally, this was a mark of respect and a desire to fulfill the law. But the Pharisees began to do more than this. Rather than just doing this themselves and saying, this is my particular means of honoring the Lord God, they began to look at other people and say, you're not quite so holy.

You're not quite so righteous because you don't follow these rituals that I observe. I see this as an expression of my relationship with God and my holiness. I don't see you doing this.

Therefore, I don't think you're quite as holy. I don't think you're quite where you need to be in your relationship with God. So they began to judge others by the standard that they had set for themselves.

Now we can set standards for ourselves. We have standards of dress, don't we, for church. Some of us feel like any time we come to the assembly, it is an opportunity to outwardly show our respect for God and for His Word and for His people, and so we'll try to always wear a coat and tie.

There are other people that say, isn't it wonderful that God accepts us as we are, and we might come in our overalls or in a clean, casual shirt and a pair of slacks. Neither one of those people is sinning. Neither one of those people is doing wrong.

But it's easy for one of those people to judge the other person, isn't it? The guy in the overalls could say, oh, those bunch of hyper-religious, legalistic people, why they make me uncomfortable sitting there and looking down on me because I don't have on a tie. They're trying to please God by the way they dress, and they can't do that. They ought to know that God takes us the way we are, and we ought to be able to dress the way we want to.

And there's a sense in which some of those things are true in what God looks at when He sees that person sitting in the overalls. The person wearing the coat and tie might say, that person just doesn't really honor God the way I do. He doesn't have the sense of reverence and the sense of whatever happened to the fear of the Lord, whatever happened to reverence and honor for God.

You'd think one day a week people could drag out their best clothes and put them on to honor the

Lord. And for themselves, in applying that standard, they might be right. Where does it turn into a bad thing? It's when people start launching these attacks at each other, isn't it? I for myself might be an overall guy, or I might be a tie guy.

And for myself, if I do it out of my respect for the Lord and my understanding of His character, it's a good thing. But if I start throwing rocks at other people because they're not doing the good thing I'm doing, now I'm off into a big error. And not only are people going to be unhappy with me, but God Himself is going to be unhappy with me.

And He will say to me, who are you to judge another man's servant? We have our hands full trying to make sure that our own operation is pleasing before the Lord, don't we? Without creating standards and then judging people by them. That was the Pharisees' problem. So they came to Jesus and they said, look, we think this dish washing business is a great thing.

It's hygienic. It honors the Lord. It's sort of an amplification and going the extra mile for the Mosaic Law.

We think this is great. And your disciples don't do it. All of that was fine until they said, your disciples.

As soon as they started looking at someone else and judging by that standard, oh boy. So this is what Jesus addresses. And He says in Mark 7, 6, Well, did Isaiah prophesy of you? This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me.

And they worship Me in vain. They teach like doctrines the traditions of men. That was something God had said in the Old Testament.

Israel had this problem a long time, didn't they? Way back in Isaiah's day. Way back in Moses' day. And I suspect all the way back in Abel and Seth's day, we've had this trouble.

Cain and Abel looked at each other. Cain said, How come God likes His sacrifice and doesn't like my sacrifice? What's the matter with my tossed salad here? How come I can't put a tossed salad on the altar? And he got angry at Abel because God accepted his sacrifice and not his own. Right away we had this judging of one another.

So then Jesus gave some teaching that we covered last Sunday about that it's not what happens on the outside that counts. It's what's on the inside. It's from the heart that those evil things proceed that defile a man.

Not eating with a dirty dish. Not failing to wash your hands. Or if you pick a few grains on the Sabbath, that hasn't defiled you.

It's what's going on in your heart. And we thought about this just this morning when we gave our offering, didn't we? It isn't whether or not we put something in the plate. It certainly is whether or

not the person next to us put something in the plate.

What matters is what's going on in my heart. You may have been sitting here and maybe your finances are tight and you aren't able to give to the church at this particular time. You don't feel it would be honoring to the Lord at this time.

And yet in your heart you may have given God a tremendous gift by having the desire and wanting to be able to do that as an expression of the cheerfulness of your heart. That's what God is looking for. God doesn't need our cash, does He? He owns the cattle on a thousand hills.

He created everything in the universe, including ourselves. He's got control of the great forces of the economy. God can tip the basket in His own direction and provide Himself with what He needs.

He does not depend on our gifts. He purposely includes us in His plan to give us the opportunity to express what's in our heart. And that's what it is.

It's an exercise in the expression of what's in our heart. And it has to be for ourselves alone. And if we start looking at others, we run into trouble.

Now the reason this is important and the reason we're going to step back now and take a larger look at Mark, that is where we are in the ministry of Jesus Christ. Religious opposition has started to build to the ministry of Jesus Christ. At first, He was a curiosity.

He was sort of an unknown. He was entertaining. He was unique.

He was different. We've never seen anybody do the things that this man does. The blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear.

Demons are cast out. None of our guys can cast out demons. And here, with a word, out they go.

We never saw a man with authority like this. We never heard teaching like this with such authority. He's unique.

He's strange. And so the religious leaders began to come out and try to analyze Him. And before long, they took a dislike to Him.

They said, you know, you're not operating on the system that we've built for ourselves here. You're not observing our rituals. You're not endorsing our teaching.

You're not pointing to us and saying, there's your religious leadership. Look at these faithful Pharisees and these faithful scribes. You're not endorsing us and you're not supporting us.

You're kind of going your own way here. You're digging back in the Old Testament and acting like you're qualified to teach the law. And you've never even been to school.

So they found reason to find fault because Jesus was kind of upsetting the apple cart. He became very popular. And Pharisees sort of liked that popularity themselves.

They were the ones that liked to stand on the street corner and be recognized as great spiritual men in Israel. So this conflict of viewpoint between the external on the part of the Pharisees and looking at the heart on the part of Jesus Christ created conflict. And that conflict is building as Jesus continues to minister.

And at this point in His ministry, it is starting to go from a passive grumbling and complaining to an active resistance on the part of these religious leaders. We saw this past Wednesday as we looked at a miracle that Jesus did in the synagogue that it was the last time recorded in Scripture that He was allowed to teach in a synagogue. The synagogue rulers wouldn't let Him in anymore.

And this man sort of grudgingly let Him in and then He healed someone and the synagogue ruler got upset and said, you ought to do that on the other six days of the week, not on the Sabbath. And that was probably His last speaking engagement at that synagogue. So this resistance is building.

And the distinction and the conflict between those two points of view is becoming more and more clear. And we need to get a grip on this because Jesus' ministry is about to change. And that change helps us understand all of the rest of the episodes in the next several chapters of Mark, beginning in chapter 8. Now to see this, we're going to do something we don't ordinarily do.

We're going to go to another gospel. I have enjoyed going through Mark and pretty well sticking with His details and not reaching into the other gospels because God had a purpose in giving us individual accounts. You can do one kind of a study where you get all of the details from all the gospels and we almost always do that.

But it's great to take one account and see God's purpose in that particular book and kind of restrict ourselves to that. But we're going to have the exception that proves the rule here and go over to John chapter 6. I want to show you something really interesting over here in John 6. Now John chapter 6 begins with the Passover and the feeding of the 5,000, which we have already covered. So we're in a part of John that covers right after what we've been studying.

But John gives us some different details. After the 5,000 being fed in 6.1-14, and after Jesus walking on the water in chapter 6, verses 15-21, then in verse 22 of chapter 6 of John, John 6.22, on the following day, the people who were standing on the other side of the sea saw that there was no one there. This is after the feeding of the 5,000.

They chased back around the lake and find Jesus. They say, how come you didn't stay? Because they wanted to make Him king. So then Jesus says in verse 26, You seek Me not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.

Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him. They said, what shall we do that we may work the works of God? He said, this is the work of God that you believe in Him whom He has sent. The work of God begins with faith.

The work of God is bound up in faith. Believe in Him whom God has sent. So then in verse 30, what sign will you perform that we may see it and believe you? What work will you do? Now Jesus has just fed 5,000 people.

He spent the previous two years healing, casting out demons. And so what kind of a question is this? What sign will you perform that we may see it and believe you? What work will you do? Jesus has just said that the work of God is to trust God. And now they're saying, show us a work.

And they say, Moses gave them manna in the desert. That is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat. So in verse 32, Jesus says, Most assuredly I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven.

For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. Now this bread motif is something that has come up in our recent episodes, hasn't it? We saw Jesus break the bread on the mountaintop and feed 5,000 men and their families. Now He's talking about bread again.

They're asking for more physical bread and He's saying, you're missing the point. They're saying, give us a sign. And He's saying, you're missing the sign.

I already gave you the sign. The sign was the physical bread. That bread was supposed to make you think in deeper terms.

And we're going to see Him teach this lesson to the disciples this morning. So He said, this bread that I'm talking about is not physical bread. It's spiritual bread.

It's bread from God. It is Jesus Christ Himself. Now it's not even His physical body.

It's His presence. It's His mission. It's His work that He's going to do on the cross.

He is the door to God the Father. He says, I am the way, the truth, and the life. So what is the purpose of God? Is the purpose of God to provide our physical needs as an end in itself? Or is that a means to an end? God sustains us physically in this life so that we can accomplish spiritual goals, right? Simply sustaining us in this life doesn't accomplish God's purpose.

It's a part of His general grace. But the reason God sustains us is so that body and soul will hold together and our soul can go do that which God has created us to do, which is to trust Him. We live, we are sustained to trust in God.

That's our purpose. Everything else that God does in our life stems from that trust. So Jesus says in verse 35, I am the bread of life.

He who comes to me shall never hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst. But I say to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and the one who comes to me I will by no means cast out.

Now this is significant in a couple of ways. Jesus says, look, I have come and a lot of you don't believe in me. He says, I've come and I've given the signs and you can't even see past the sign.

You see the sign, you like the sign, and you want more of the sign. That's why they flocked to Jesus for healing. That's why they wanted to make Him king on the mountain because He gave them bread.

And they said, look, our economic problems are over with. Wouldn't it be great if President Clinton could multiply loaves and fish? Our economic problems would be over with. He could walk down to the docks in New York and Los Angeles and lay his hand on a ship and suddenly there would be great amounts of food that we could sell to other nations and cancel our national debt and go into a great wave of prosperity.

People see this and say, oh, if we just had the money, if we just had the people, if we just had the resources, what great things could be done. God says, you're missing the point. I don't need any of that stuff.

I can take faith like a grain of mustard seed and move a mountain in the presence of that faith. People were healed in the presence of faith. People were not healed in Nazareth because of the absence of faith.

God's power is never diminished, but God chooses when and where He's going to work. Where does He work? He works where people express faith. Jesus came to be an object of faith.

He says, I'm the bread of life. Partake of that bread. Take it in and seize it.

And you'll have eternal life. These folks have missed the point. They're still thinking, boy, what a great deal.

We don't have to depend on the Romans. We don't have to pay tax-free bread. We didn't earn it.

It was created. We ate it. They took up the baskets.

What a great system. Let's make this man king of Israel and our food problems are solved. And Jesus is saying, look, you're missing the point.

These physical things are pointing to the spiritual. And He says here, when He says that the one

who comes to Me, I will by no means cast out. That is significant because God chose Israel to be His people, didn't He? Israel is a chosen nation, a peculiar people.

God carved them out for Himself out of all the nations of the earth. And when Jesus comes to reinforce and to fulfill and to culminate the plan of God, He is an Israelite. Jesus was a Jew.

A lot of people forget that. A lot of people that have anti-Semitic leanings and claim to be Christians forget that in being anti-Semitic, they're anti-Jesus Christ. He was as Semitic as you can get.

Son of David, that's His claim to the throne. Mary and Joseph that we celebrate at Christmas were Jews. The apostles were all Jews.

Every one of them, all twelve. And so, God fulfilled and manifested His promises and His plan in Israel. But what has happened? God has sent His Son, Jesus Christ, in the flesh.

God incarnate standing on the stones and pebbles of Israel and they're busy asking for more bread. They're busy asking for more physical healing. I've got Uncle Uriah over here with a withered hand.

Please heal him. I've got my little daughter here. Please give her sight.

She was born blind or whatever. Those are wonderful things. They're not evil.

They're not sinful. They miss the point. God says, here is My Son in the flesh and you're still occupied with earthly details.

What happened to all the people that Jesus healed? Where are they today? The arms that were straightened, the limbs that were restored, the sight and the hearing, the speaking ability that was restored. Where are all of those things today? They're dust in the ground, aren't they? Those physical effects in those people's lives have been dust and ashes for 2,000 years. It was a temporary thing.

It was a sign that was designed to point to something permanent and eternal. And they missed it. Because Israel missed this message, because they didn't think past the sign, something is going to change in Jesus' ministry.

And it changes here this morning. If you read on down through chapter 6 in John, you're familiar with it. That Jesus says, I'm the bread of life, and unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, in verse 53, and drink His blood, you have no life in you.

Now Jesus is radicalizing His message, isn't He? He says, unless you eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man, you have no life in you. Now this is radical, this is startling. Why does Jesus say this? This suggests cannibalism.

Eat human flesh, drink blood, not since Noah got out of the ark, and God gave the first admonition, don't eat things that are strangled, don't drink blood. Those were the two regulations that the Jews gave to the Gentiles. They said, we won't hold the law over you, but this is a universal law.

You don't eat what's strangled and you don't drink blood. Jesus is saying, eat my flesh and drink my blood, or you have no life in you. Why does He do that? This alienated thousands of people.

Thousands of His followers returned back from following. They said, what are you talking about? Cannibal to eat your flesh, drink your blood? You're crazy. I can read my own Torah here, and I know that we don't partake of blood.

And I don't care what else you say. If you say we've got to partake of blood, there's something the matter with you, goodbye. And John tells us that those people left.

They turned back from following, and so much so that Jesus is going to ask His disciples in verse 67, do you also want to go away? Because they couldn't figure this out. But that was the point. Why did Jesus say this in such a radical fashion? Because they're taking everything literally.

They're taking the bread literally. They're taking the water of life literally. And Jesus says, that's your problem.

Let me show you what happens when you take things literally. You've got to eat my flesh and drink my blood or you have no life in you. And He's pointing out to them, don't you see that you can't take it literally? If you take it literally, you're a cannibal and a blood drinker.

And He's saying, don't take it literally, think past it. Jesus is using the biggest leverage that He's got in His arsenal to pry them off of earthly view, human solutions, and to get them to think in spiritual terms. But it didn't work.

And they departed. They turned back from following after Him. They got disgusted because their objectives were not being accomplished.

Why was that crowd at the base of the mountain where the feeding of the 5,000 took place? Why did they want to make Jesus king? They wanted a political solution. They wanted an economic solution in Israel. Let's throw off Roman rule.

We've got a man here with some supernatural power. He can provide our food. He can heal our ills.

Let's throw off the Romans. Let's make this man king. They were unhappy with their political situation.

They were unhappy with their economic situation. And they saw in Jesus an answer to those

problems. Those are earthly.

Those are human. Those are temporary. They missed the point.

Because of that, now turn back to Mark 7, verse 31. In fact, we'll turn back further. We'll start back in Mark 7, verse 24.

After Jesus has addressed the Pharisees, after He has made this speech about His flesh and His blood, we pick up the story here in Mark 7, verse 24. From there He arose and went to the region of Tyre and Sidon. Jesus has confronted Israel with their hyper-literal approach.

He has confronted them with their lack of interest in what's behind the sign, in what the spiritual reality is. So then He arose and went to the region of Tyre. He went into a house and wanted no one to know it, but He could not be hidden.

Now, this tells us something. When Jesus went to Tyre, He didn't go there for the purpose of extending and continuing His public ministry, did He? He didn't go there to assemble crowds and teach. He went there and He didn't want anyone to know it.

But He went there with His disciples. What conclusion can we draw? He and His disciples are going to have time together. Perhaps they're going to rest.

I'm sure that He's going to continue to teach them and to train them as He has been doing in this phase of His ministry. But He wasn't interested in public ministry. He wasn't going to go heal.

He wasn't going to cast out demons. He removed Himself from Israel and was going to concentrate on those responsibilities. So He entered a house and wanted no one to know it, but He could not be hidden.

And a woman whose young daughter had an unclean spirit heard about Him and she came and fell at His feet. This woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by birth. And she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

Jesus said to her, let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs. Notice, out of all of the possible illustrations that Jesus could have used, what is it that turns up in this little comparison? Bread. Bread.

It's bread that's being broken on the mountain. It's bread that Jesus represents Himself as being. I am the bread of life.

He talks to this woman and He says, the bread goes first to the little children. That was Jesus' mission, to present that bread of life, Himself, His work, His identity as the Son of God, as an object of faith for Israel to them first. But notice where He is.

He has gone to Tyre, because in large measure, He has not been accepted in that role. They

haven't taken the bread. What happened after the feeding of the 5,000? How many baskets of fragments were taken up? Twelve baskets of fragments.

Do you think that Jesus just made a superabundance so that it would go to waste? Or do you think that He probably prepared exactly what they needed and they didn't accept it? Twelve full baskets. Each disciple comes back looking at a basket full of fragments of bread and fish after the feeding of the 5,000. That implies rejection.

They ate as much as they wanted, but look at how much was left over. They were all fed and satisfied, but they didn't eat as much as Jesus wanted to give them, did they? They ate as much as they wanted and there were twelve full baskets left over. So this bread motif is important.

We have to understand what it means. And Jesus is going to teach this to the disciples. So this lady answers and says, Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children's crumbs.

And he realizes that she sees the issue. So many in Israel, so many of the religious leaders didn't see the issue, but she does. She recognizes that the little children are Israel and that the little dogs under the table are the Gentiles.

And she also recognizes what Jesus said over in John 6. He that comes to Me, I will in no wise cast out. You don't have to be Jewish to come to God. You don't have to be a law keeper.

And this is something Israel could never fathom, it could never conceive of, but they're about to conceive of it because Jesus is going to impress it upon them. And He starts to tell them. When He says to Israel, No one can come to Me except the Father draw him.

That's also in John 6. We take that today and we say, well, we know that none of us can turn to the Lord unless God draws us and that there is that drawing ministry and it's necessary to come to God. But think of it as an Israelite. Israelite said, well, we're the people of God.

Of course we come to God. But now here are Gentiles. Here's this Syrophenician woman.

We're about to see another Gentile. We're about to see Jesus minister to a whole crowd of Gentiles. The Jews can't explain this.

Why is God giving grace to the Gentiles? We're the people of God. We're the chosen seed of Israel's race. We are the ones to whom the law and the prophets and so forth are given.

But what does Jesus say? If people are coming to Me, it's because the Father is drawing them. And you've got to consider that. We always take that verse in one way.

Well, it's necessary for the Father to draw so that we can come and that's true. But in this context, the Jews, if you look at what John says, he says the Jews come and say, why is this taking

place? And Jesus says, no one can come to Me except the Father draws him. What does that mean? If the Gentiles are coming, they're being drawn by the Father just like the Jews.

Oh, this is an unhappy thought to the Jews. What? You mean people that don't hold our traditions and our beliefs and aren't even descendants of Abraham, God is drawing them also? How awful! And of course, this attitude is what the book of Jonah was written to depict. The book of Jonah is not only a historical account of a man eaten by a great fish, but Jonah pictures Israel and Israel's self-centered grip on the truth.

And when Jonah says, I don't want to go to Nineveh and preach to those pagans, God says, look, I'm drawing them to Myself. Jonah says, I'm going the other way. And God says, oh no, you're not.

And God sends him to Nineveh. And then when Nineveh responds, you would think this is a cause for great rejoicing. These people have repented.

They've responded to the message of the Lord. They're groveling in sackcloth and ashes. And what does Jonah do? He's up on top of the hill under his little broom tree kicking stones and saying, oh, shucks, I knew God was going to do this.

I was waiting for the big fire and brimstone show and now He's had mercy on them. And they were unhappy that God had had mercy on someone else. And so Israel tended toward this sort of self-centered, we've got the truth and that's all that counts type of mentality.

Jesus is about to confront that again here. So He goes to Tyre and He says to this lady, this Seraphimician woman in Mark 7.29, for this saying, because you recognize that there is an overflow from that which is given to the people of God. These fragments are left over after the meal and you're entitled to them.

For this saying, go your way. The demon has gone out of your daughter. When she came to her house, she found the demon gone out and her daughter lying on the bed.

What a wonderful thing to see because this is the beginning of the ministry to the Gentiles. This is the first concrete example among many. You have the Roman centurion and so forth.

But at this point in Jesus' ministry, this is pivotal. This is a hinge between His exclusive ministry to Israel and the beginning of the widening and broadening of that appeal to everyone. Then in verse 31, He departed from Tyre and Sidon.

Where did He go? He went through the midst of the region of Decapolis, the ten cities that Rome had built out on the east side of the Jordan, the east side of the Sea of Galilee, out in non-Israel. He came through there and came to the Sea of Galilee. So He's now on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, not far from where the swine and the half-Jewish people all lived.

I say the swine, where the swine ran down into the sea. They brought to Him one who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech, and they begged Him to put His hand on him. He took him aside from the multitude and put His fingers in his ears, and He spat and touched his tongue.

Then looking up to heaven, He sighed and said to him, Ephphatha, that is, be opened. Immediately His ears were opened and the impediment of His tongue was loosed and He spoke plainly. He commanded them that they should tell no one, but the more He commanded them, the more widely they proclaimed it.

And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, He has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak." But it's so interesting, at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, what was the very first thing that Jesus did in the Gospel of Mark? What's the first miraculous thing? He went to the synagogue and taught and cast a demon out of a man. What's the next thing that He did? He healed physical illnesses.

The fever of Peter's mother-in-law and all in the town that came to Him that evening after the Sabbath sun had set. Now the pattern is being established for the Gentiles. The first thing He does for the Gentiles, He casts out a demon.

The next thing He does is He clears up this deafness and He fixes this speech impediment. It's a picture of what happens at salvation, isn't it? The evil within us is removed and cleansed. And then God gives us the ability both to hear and to speak in spiritual terms.

He gives us the ability to partake of that spiritual bread. This is what the author of Hebrews talks about when he says that those in Israel in the wilderness, they all ate of the same spiritual food and they drank that spiritual drink and that rock that followed them was Jesus Christ. He talks about the fact that it wasn't their physical trek through the wilderness.

It was the spiritual issue. Jesus Christ in this part of Mark is broadening and extending this offer of the spiritual bread to the Gentiles even before the Israelites are aware of it, before anything formal is said. You can see the opportunity opening up.

What is it based on? Israel isn't responding. There are fragments of the bread left over. What's going to happen to those? God doesn't send out the bread and have it returned to him void, does He? So, that goodness and that graciousness of God is going to extend over to the Gentiles.

And it's going to be assigned to them. It's not just that they get physical healing. It's not just that they get demons cast out.

It's assigned to them just like it is to Israel that God's mercy extends to them. He that comes to me, I will in no wise cast out. Let's close by looking over in Isaiah 55-56.

So much of what Jesus did is laid out for us in Isaiah. I think that Jesus had huge portions of

Isaiah committed to memory and He meditated on these and He guided a lot of His own earthly ministry by what was revealed in Isaiah. If you read John's account, you find that there was a point in this same section in chapter 6 and chapter 7 area there where Jesus went down to the temple and stood up and quoted Isaiah 55, verse 1. Oh, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters.

You who have no money, come, buy and eat. Come buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for what is not bread and wages for what does not satisfy? This is God's message to Israel in Isaiah 55, both in the Old Testament days and in Jesus' day.

Why do you focus on the things that are temporary, the things that don't count? There is an eternal reality. There's a spiritual truth that God desires for us to seize and grasp. Listen carefully to me and eat what is good.

Notice how you eat what is good. It's by listening carefully. Listen carefully to me and eat what is good.

And let your soul delight itself in abundance. Incline your ear and come to me. Here and your soul shall live.

And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, the sure mercies of David. Verse 6, seek the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near.

Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts. Let him return to the Lord and He will have mercy on him. And to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. God is saying you can partake of those higher thoughts if you get past the material, if you get past the earthly, if you get past the sign and see the reality that Jesus presents.

That was His message to Israel. That's what Jesus proclaimed when He stood up in the temple and said, He who is thirsty, let him come to Me. And out of the center of His being will flow rivers of living water.

Now look at Isaiah 56. Isn't it interesting, the sequence here? Look at Isaiah 56.3. Do not let the son of the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord speak, saying the Lord has utterly separated me from His people. Nor let the eunuchs say, Here I am a dry tree, for thus saith the Lord.

To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths and choose what pleases me and hold fast my covenant, even to them I will give in my house and within my walls a place and a name better than that of

sons and daughters. I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. And the sons of the foreigner who join themselves to the Lord to serve Him and to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants, everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath and holds fast my covenant, I will bring them to my holy mountain.

I will make them joyful in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar. For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations." Doesn't that ring a bell when we think of Jesus cleansing the temple and the money changers? And He quotes this verse.

He's not just saying that it's a house of prayer. It's a house of prayer for all nations. People who recognize that quote and where it came from would have thought back to this chapter and remembered that Jesus said, The son of the foreigner will be just as welcome as an Israelite if he honors the Lord.

These references to keeping the Sabbath, when you think about the Ten Commandments, the first four commandments are what? I am the Lord your God. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Don't make any idols, any graven images.

And help me out with the third commandment. Oh, that's terrible. We're a Bible church and we don't know our Ten Commandments and I'm the worst of all.

Exodus 20. I do know that much. Exodus 20.

Because the fourth commandment is the commandment that deals with the Sabbath. Don't make any graven image. Don't take the name of the Lord in vain.

Is the third. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Those first four commandments all deal with our relationship to God, don't they? I am the Lord your God.

Don't have any gods before me. Don't put anyone in my place. Don't use my name in vain.

And remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Why? Because that's the day that God rested. And if God rested, you ought to rest and think about Him.

So the Sabbath day commandment encompasses and fulfills the other three. If you keep the Sabbath, you're doing the first three. Why else would you keep the Sabbath if you're truly keeping it from the heart? So that's what Isaiah says in chapter 56.

These foreigners, these people that have no chance for a future in Israel because they are eunuchs. They can't have sons and daughters. God says, you follow me, trust me, and I will give you something better than sons and daughters.

I'll give you something eternal that lasts beyond physical children. These verses are in Jesus'

mind at this time in His ministry. These verses are in His mind as He goes to Tyre and as He casts out the demon from the Syrophoenician woman's daughter.

These are in His mind when He takes this Gentile man on the east side of the Sea of Galilee and gives him the ability to hear and the ability to speak. It's a promise. It's an encouragement.

It's an expression of God's mercy that whoever comes to Me, I will in no wise cast out. And it's also a reminder to Israel that your birthright and your heritage as Israelites doesn't guarantee you relationship with God. Any more than laying a check in the plate guarantees that God will be pleased.

God is looking in the heart. And He doesn't care if it's a Jewish heart or a Gentile heart. He's looking for someone who will keep His covenant and keep His Sabbath, who will love Him and make Him the object of their faith.

This is the great point of decision for the nation of Israel. And as the focus of Jesus' ministry slowly shifts to training the disciples and preparing to open this up to the Gentiles, we see the early signs of it right here in Jesus' ministry as He goes to the Gentiles and expresses God's mercy to them. Let's close in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank You for the truth of these things. We thank You for the wonderful panorama that we see in Your Word of the unfolding of Your plan, the greatness of Your character, the wonderful, incomprehensible greatness of Your mercy and Your love for us. We thank You that as part of that great mass of Gentile people, Your mercy and Your grace have extended to us.

And even though we are foreigners, we are not of the household of Israel, yet You have drawn us to Yourself. You have called us and You have given us the full measure of the work of Jesus Christ, Your righteousness, eternal life, bright hope for the future, a special place in Your plan. We pray that we can see past the signs.

We pray that we can see past the earthly problems of this life, the earthly challenges, the earthly needs for provision, the desires that we have on an earthly plane, that we can see past those things and see the greatness of Your plan, the greatness of Your purpose, and that they will be fulfilled in us, both individually and as a church. We ask these things in the name of our Savior. We pray that they will reflect His glory.

Amen.