

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: BREATHLESS

(studies in the Gospel of Mark)

What to DO with a Messiah?

(Mark 7:31--8:38)

Study #15

Introduction: The hopes and dreams of all the years, met in Messiah...

- You may be longing for the arrival of a superstar to restore the San Antonio Spurs basketball team back to the top tier among the NBA's elite;
- You may be hoping to see the Cowboys back on top of the NFL heap, like it was in the "good ol' days" (with Tom Landry);
- You may be hungry for someone who will lead our nation to economic prosperity;
- You may be eager to meet the future Mr. or Mrs. "Right" -

but I can assure you that your eagerness for that special person who will fill a void in your world - politically, romantically, or athletically - pales in comparison to the fervor with which the ancient Jews longed for the One they called "Messiah."

It is no exaggeration to say that in the years leading up to the birth of Jesus, anticipation for the arrival of the Messiah ran at a fever pitch.

From the Jewish Christian scholar, Alfred Edersheim¹ we learn much about Messianic expectations and about what the Jews of Jesus' day thought about the coming Messiah (or, "the Christ").

¹ Edersheim wrote the definitive book on Old Testament background to the Gospels in The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah.

This Messiah would be anointed, not with anointing oil as priests and kings were, but with the Spirit of God.

It was believed that Messiah existed before He was born and was more exalted than Moses, the great Lawgiver. The Jews anticipated that the Messiah would not exactly be a divine person, but that He was far above any other being - be he royalty, a prophet, or even an angel.

The rabbis could point to 456 passages that they said spoke of the Messiah,² and believed that every miracle God had ever performed on behalf of Israel in the Old Testament would be repeated by the Messiah when He came.

The Messiah was the key to Israel's national restoration and to her salvation from Roman domination.

In some places Messiah is identified as the "light" that shone in the darkness on the first day of creation. He is actually referred to by the ineffable name, "Yahweh" and will defeat Satan in the last days.

Without question, the hopes of the Jews at the time of Jesus were all wrapped up in the arrival of the one they called "Messiah."

In the somewhat extended passage we are exploring this morning we will see that Jesus validated in every way possible that He was, in fact, that Messiah.

Jesus, Messiah (7:24--8:26)

A Light to the Gentiles (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6, 9)

How did He validate His claim to be the Messiah? Well, look at His involvement in the world of the Gentiles.

It is clear from numerous Old Testament texts that the Messiah would serve all of humanity, and not just the Jews.

² Truthfully, this is a stretch. It does show, however, that the people were obsessed with the idea of the coming Messiah. They saw him in every text.

The prophet Isaiah writes that the Messiah will be “*a light to the nations*” (42:6) “*so that [God’s] salvation may reach to the end of the earth.*” (49:6).

And, while it is true, of course, that the bulk of Jesus’ ministry was confined to the Jews and to the land of Palestine, His travels and service outside of Israel perfectly check that box.

In fact, it is in this section of Mark’s Gospel where we are today that we see His passionate heart to reach all people everywhere.

***[7:24a] Jesus got up and went away from there to the region of Tyre...
[7:31] Again He went out from the region of Tyre, and came through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, within the region of Decapolis.
[8:27a] Jesus went out, along with His disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi...***

As we saw last Sunday, Jesus was more than willing to perform miracles of healing and exorcism on behalf of Gentiles.

He cast a demon out of the daughter of a distraught Syro-Phoenician woman. And as we will see today, He performed other miracles among the Gentiles as well, and miracles of a particularly Messianic variety.

Following the exorcism, He traveled by a circuitous route from the region of Tyre to the region of the Decapolis, a loosely defined and very large geographic area with ten more or less major cities.

[31] Again He went out from the region of Tyre, and came through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, within the region of Decapolis.

This actually involved Jesus traveling twenty miles north from Tyre to the city of Sidon and then in a wide arc southward, across the River Leontes to some place in the Decapolis, on the east side of the Sea of Galilee.³

³ This represented nearly one hundred and twenty miles of travel and would be roughly equivalent to taking the horseshoe-shaped journey from Uvalde to San Antonio - via Austin!

He took this route so that He could visit as many Gentile towns and villages as possible on this trip, something that a more direct “as the crow flies” route would simply not have allowed.

When Jesus arrived in the Decapolis area, He was already well known. His fame had preceded Him. And as soon as He showed up, a few friends brought a friend with twin disabilities to Jesus.

The Deaf Hear (Isaiah 35:5; Mark 7:31-37)⁴

Seeking Jesus’ help (v. 32)

[32] They brought to Him one who was deaf and spoke with difficulty and they implored Him to lay His hand on him.

There is reason to believe that this man had not been born deaf, but had suffered a profound loss of hearing - maybe by disease, maybe by injury.

He spoke, but with a speech impediment, something that someone who had never been able to hear would not likely have been able to do. And a speech impediment, of course, is very common among those who are profoundly hard of hearing.

The friends who brought their disabled friend to Jesus believed that Jesus could help him.⁵

Deliverance for a doubly disabled man (vv. 33-35)

Jesus’ touch (v. 33)

From time to time you will hear people say that Jesus *always* does this or that, or that He *always* healed this way or that way. Nonsense.

Jesus’ healings followed no patterns. His actions were dictated by the need of the situation.

⁴ This is an event that none of the other Gospels writers include.

⁵ See Isaiah 35:5ff - The Messiah is the One who unstops the ears of the deaf and provides song for the man who cannot speak.

And here, dealing with this desperate man, He took him away from the crowd and used physical touch to make him whole.

[33] Jesus took him aside from the crowd, by himself, and put His fingers into his ears, and after spitting, He touched his tongue with the saliva

The physical touch of the affected organs with fingers and spittle - ear and tongue - spoke of identification and compassion.

And if the description of the treatment sounds a bit odd, I think that He did what He did to build confidence/faith in the afflicted man, who could not have heard about Jesus, since He was deaf.

The touch was the beginning of the miracle, but we keep reading and find that there was more involved.

A word of prayer (v. 34)

[34] and looking up to heaven with a deep sigh, He said to him, “Ephphatha!” that is, “Be opened!”

His look to heaven affirms His contact with His heavenly Father. His deep sigh speaks to His emotional engagement with this man. And His words - words spoken to a deaf man? - were directed at the man's ears! He commanded that the ears start working again.

Well, the ears were listening even if the man couldn't hear, because, just like that, the ears responded to the One who made man's ears in the first place!

Healed! (v. 35)

[35] And his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was removed, and he began speaking plainly.

He now hears perfectly, which paved the way for him to speak without defect.⁶

⁶ Literally, Mark tells us that “*the chain of his tongue was broken.*”

When the prophet Isaiah wrote about the ministry of the coming Messiah, he said that Messiah would unstop the ears of the deaf. (Isaiah 35:5). It would be hard to miss the reality that Jesus' miracle here was Messianic.

And when Jesus ordered secrecy after this miraculous healing, well, that order was disobeyed with gusto!

An attempt at secrecy (v. 36a)

[36a] And He gave them orders not to tell anyone...

There was simply too much enthusiasm, too much energy, too much excitement to NOT speak. In fact, the more insistent Jesus was about silence, the more the crowds talked!

Proclamation! (v. 37)

[36b]...but the more He ordered them, the more widely they continued to proclaim it. [37] They were utterly astonished, saying, “He has done all things well; He makes even the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.”

Sheer exuberance made it tough to keep silent about what they had just seen Jesus do.⁷

Following this miracle, Jesus continued in the Decapolis for some time, giving Himself to a preaching and teaching and healing and exorcising ministry - still among the Gentiles.

While in the Decapolis, Mark brings us into a wilderness scene. We've seen Jesus in the wilderness before.

⁷ Taking this one miracle to heart (again, a fulfillment of Isaiah 35:5), they generalized that Jesus did “all things well” (perhaps an echo, in Mark's mind, at least, of Genesis 1, “and God saw that it was good” 6x?).

He was tempted by Satan in the wilderness (1:13), went to pray in a secluded wild place (1:35), spent a good bit of time in unpopulated areas (1:45), and once retreated with His disciples to be by themselves - and ended up feeding five thousand people in a *“desolate place”* (6:35).

Now He is with His disciples again in a desolate place. This time, though, it is not in a Jewish wilderness. This time they are in Gentile territory. They are likely somewhere near the northeast side of the Sea of Galilee. And a very large crowd has come out to Jesus.

Bread in the Wilderness (Exodus 16:4; Mark 8:1-10)

The plight of a multitude (vv. 1-3)

A multitude with Jesus (v. 1a)

[1a] In those days, when there was again⁸ a large crowd...

If we wonder at all about how a large crowd might have gathered to Jesus in this non-Jewish area, there are at least a couple of possible explanations.

It is certainly possible that the news of the healing of the deaf man had already gotten out, prompting people from far and wide to seek Jesus out.

But, just as likely a possibility is that the Gerasene demoniac, the man we read about back in chapter 5, had successfully carried out the assignment Jesus had given him.

You'll remember that Jesus told that man, ***[5:19] “Go home to your people and declare to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you.”***

Personally, I read this story of a great crowd of Gentiles coming to Jesus in the Decapolis as the success story of the former Gerasene demoniac, who carried out his assignment to perfection!

Mark tells us that the large crowd that has gathered to Jesus is facing a crisis.

Jesus to the disciples (vv. 1b-3)

[1] In those days, when there was again a large crowd and they had nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples and said to them, [2] “I feel compassion for the people,⁹ because they have remained¹⁰ with Me now three days and have nothing to eat. [3] “If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way; and some of them have come from a great distance.”

This great crowd of people (we will later learn that there were over four thousand) has run out of food.

They have been with Jesus for three days. They have likely been listening to Him teach, watching Him perform miracles, and trying to figure out His parables.

Now they are hungry. Really hungry. Their provisions are exhausted.

This is quite different than the first feeding, where the disciples urged Jesus to send the crowds away so that they could buy some food in the villages. In the wilderness of the Decapolis, there were no villages nearby. They were way out in the sticks.

There is no food to be found within a reasonable distance and they are weak with hunger. It is no place to be without provisions, but there they are - with no provisions!

Jesus saw this situation and was moved by the crowd's need. He felt deep compassion for this crowd of folks who had come to get their spiritual hunger satisfied and were now needing physical nourishment.

⁹ In other places, Mark tells us that Jesus also felt compassion for lepers (1:41), revolutionaries (6:34), Gentiles (8:2), and the demon-possessed (9:22).

¹⁰ Remained (“abide). A word that implies a special commitment to Jesus. They were very intentionally WITH Jesus.

⁸ The word “again” is perhaps there to invite us to think about the other feeding.

So, unlike with the feeding of the five thousand, where the disciples pointed out the problem to Jesus, here Jesus points out the problem to the disciples.

Their response, having watched Jesus feed thousands in Galilee just a few weeks earlier, is remarkable.¹¹

The disciples to Jesus (v. 4)

[4] And His disciples answered Him, “Where will anyone be able to find enough bread here in this desolate place to satisfy these people?”

You would think, given the relatively recent feeding of the five thousand, that the disciples would have been anticipating exactly what Jesus was going to do. Not so.

Whether it is because they momentarily forgot about the previous feeding (?) or because they found it hard to believe that Jesus would perform such a miracle for a bunch of Gentiles, we don’t know.

But it is certainly clear that they were at a loss as to how to get this crowd fed. Jesus, though, knew exactly what He planned to do.

He first made inquiry as to the amount of provisions on hand.

Provision for a multitude (vv. 5, 7a)

[5] And He was asking them, “How many loaves do you have?” And they said, “Seven.”...[7] They also had a few small fish

¹¹ Some have questioned whether there were really two feedings. Among some, there is the belief that there was only one feeding, but that it was reported in various forms. These folks would say that a highly divergent version provided the basis for the second feeding reported here. Granted there are similarities - in language, in the form that the miracles take, and in the details of the reporting. But, Jesus reminds His disciples of the TWO feedings (8:19). AND the disciples’ perplexity is only understandable to us in the context of the two feedings. There seems to me to be no doubt that Jesus performed two miraculous feedings. The feeding of the five thousand in Galilee and the feeding of the four thousand here in the Decapolis.

Not much to feed so many. Not too much of a problem if You are the Messiah of God, though.

And Jesus took charge of the situation, just as He had done previously, with the feeding in Galilee.

A MIRACULOUS feeding (vv. 6, 7b, 8-9)

Seating the crowd (v. 6a)

[6a] And He directed the people to sit down on the ground

This time there is no mention of a small boy’s lunch. This time there is no mention of green grass. This time it was Jesus who had the people sit down, not the disciples. This time there is no grouping of the people into 50’s and 100’s.

But this time, as last time, Jesus miraculously multiplied a small amount of food and met the needs of thousands of people.

Feeding the crowd (vv. 6b-7)

[6b]...and taking the seven loaves, He gave thanks and broke them, and started giving them to His disciples to serve to them, and they served them to the people. [7] They also had a few small fish; and after He had blessed them, He ordered these to be served as well.

And when the crowd had all been fed, the cleanup sounds very similar to the cleanup at the other feeding.

Clean-up (v. 8)

[8] And they ate and were satisfied; and they picked up seven large baskets full of what was left over of the broken pieces.

In the first miracle, Jews were fed. Here, Gentiles receive the food. There were twelve baskets of leftovers following the other feeding. Here, there are only seven.

So the scale is a bit less grandiose in this miracle. Even the crowd was a bit smaller.

The count (v. 9)

[9] About four thousand were there;¹² and He sent them away.

But the power of God has been no less on display and the appetites of the crowds are no less satisfied here than there.

And just as we saw in the healing of the man who was deaf, so here we see Jesus, the Messiah, the One with the heart for the whole world, meeting the needs of Gentiles, just as He had met the needs of Jews.

From here, Mark tells of two sad exchanges that show, among other things, a marked contrast between the reception He was getting in Gentile territory and the reception His message was getting among Jews.

First, the Pharisees demanded a sign from heaven (as if Jesus had not already performed enough signs!) “on command”, a demand with which Jesus flatly refused to cooperate.¹³

Then, He got back into the boat, only to find on this trip that the disciples didn’t seem to “get” the significance of the two feedings of the multitudes.¹⁴

At the end of this brief sailing trip across the Sea, they found themselves at the city of Bethsaida Julius, a Gentile city just north of Galilee.

And while He might have been somewhat discouraged by the conversations with His disciples and with the Pharisees, He is eager, yet again, to carry out the ministry of the Messiah, still in Gentile territory, still following Isaiah’s script.

The Blind See (Isaiah 35:5; Mark 8:22-26)

[22] And they came to Bethsaida. And they brought a blind man to Jesus and implored Him to touch him. [23] Taking the blind man by the hand, He brought him out of the village; and after spitting on his eyes and laying His hands on him, He asked him, “Do you see anything?” [24] And he looked up and said, “I see men, for I see them like trees, walking around.” [25] Then again He laid His hands on his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored, and began to see everything clearly. [26] And He sent him to his home, saying, “Do not even enter the village.”

This miracle follows the same pattern we saw with the healing of the man who was deaf.

Jesus first took the man outside of the village, away from the crowd that had brought him. Then, using the touch - touch with hands; touch with spittle - he effected a healing.

As I mentioned earlier, each miracle, each healing, has its own peculiarities - and this one is no different. Here, Jesus healed in a two-step process rather than all-at-once.

And at the end, Jesus commanded silence, as before, telling the man to not even go back to the village.

So, Jesus has cast a demon out of a little girl near Tyre (Messiah brings ***“release to the captives”***), healed a man who was deaf (Messiah ***“opens the ears of the deaf”***), fed the multitudes with fish and bread, and healed a man of his blindness (Messiah ***“gives sight to the blind”***).

All of this is concrete evidence that Jesus is the promised Messiah - which leads us to the homestretch in our study of Mark this morning.

¹² Here the reference is likely to the total number of people (4,000), not as before, 5,000 men.

¹³ Mark tells us that Jesus and the disciples traveled on the Sea of Galilee for this exchange. ***[10] And immediately He entered the boat with His disciples and came to the district of Dalmanutha.*** We have no idea, today, where Dalmanutha was located.

¹⁴ See Mark 8:14-21, where Jesus has to remind the twelve of the two feedings and urge them to not worry about a lack of bread!

With the formerly blind man no doubt rejoicing, Jesus and the twelve left Bethsaida for points north. They are heading toward the area around the Gentile city of Caesarea Philippi.

While on their way, Jesus administered a simple, two question exam to His disciples.

Recognizing Jesus, Messiah! (8:27-32a)

The General Populace - No... (8:27-28)

[27] Jesus went out, along with His disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way He questioned His disciples, saying to them, "Who do people say that I am?" [28] They told Him, saying, "John the Baptist; and others say Elijah; but others, one of the prophets."

The general thought of the people was that Jesus was somebody special. He was either a great man come back from the dead (Elijah; John the Baptist), or He was a prophet from God - something the Jews hadn't seen for hundreds of years.

You can almost see Jesus nodding His head. *"Thanks. That's helpful to understand what is the scuttlebutt out there about Me. It's good to know what others are thinking."*

But then He delivers the second question of this test.

The Disciples - Yes! (8:29)

[29] And He continued by questioning them, "But who do you say that I am?"

This is a crucial question and the pressure is ON for them to give the right answer.

After all, these twelve were the ones on whom Jesus was hanging His plans for world-wide impact. They will be entrusted with the Gospel and they will be the ones to take it to the world. They HAVE TO recognize who He is!

When it's "talk time" Simon Peter was often the spokesman for the group. So it is not surprising that here, Peter steps up to the mic. And Peter nailed it. Short. Sweet. Simple.

Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ."

To which we all want to shout, *"Way to go, Peter!"* Jesus IS the Messiah!

And we know what was implied when Peter made that one brief response to Jesus' question.

A Fuller Picture of Messiah Emerges (8:30-32a)

Conquering King - we know this part!

In the days of Jesus, when you said, "Christ/Messiah" you meant Healer, Deliverer, Savior, King! You envisioned a defeated Rome, financial security, peace and safety.

And now, to that understanding, Jesus adds a few details that give a much fuller picture of "Messiah." Listen to what Jesus, the Messiah, has to say about what it means to be Messiah.

Suffering servant (v. 31)

[30] And He warned them to tell no one about Him. [31] And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

Can you imagine how shocking those words would have been to the twelve!

While we, in retrospect, can read Old Testament passages like Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 and "get" what Jesus was saying about a *Suffering Servant* Messiah, all the twelve had ever heard about was a *Conquering King* Messiah.

What He has just told them contradicts everything they had ever heard about the career of the Messiah.

So Peter took it upon himself to set Jesus, the Messiah, straight.

Responding to Jesus, Messiah (8:32b-38)

Peter Responds to Messiah (8:32b)

[32b]...And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him.

(Hmmm - taking it upon yourself to **REBUKE** the Messiah. Not so sure about that idea, Peter...)

We wonder what Peter might he have actually said. Maybe something like -

“Jesus, don’t You know the verses that talk about Messiah’s greatness? Have you forgotten Zechariah’s vision of Messiah’s grandeur? Or Daniel’s description of the Son of Man? Or Isaiah’s portrayal of the Messianic king? Or Micah’s prophecy of Messiah’s birth and reign?”

Well, mid-way through Peter’s rebuke, Jesus interrupted and brought down a stinging rebuke of His own on Peter and on all of those who would reject the fuller picture of His Messiahship.

Messiah Speaks (8:33-38)

Rebuke of Peter and his kin (v. 33)

[33] But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.”

Woah. THAT was some rebuke. Jesus actually called Simon Peter, chief of the apostles, “Satan,” here. That is not because Peter actually became “Satan” but because his rebuke of Jesus’ full Messiahship came directly from Satan.

Nobody else in the universe would have liked to have seen Jesus’ career divorced from the cross more than Satan. He wanted Jesus to be king, save Israel from the Romans, heal people of their diseases.

But no suffering. No rejection. Just stay away from the cross.

And Peter had fallen - hook, line, and sinker - for Satan’s lure. Having affirmed that Jesus was the Messiah he rebuked the Messiah for revealing more about His Messiahship than Peter had known (or wanted to know!).

Knowing a teachable moment when He saw one, Messiah Jesus then took the opportunity of this discussion to say some something more to Peter, to the rest of the twelve apostles, and to the crowd of people that was also following.

Messiah is to be followed (vv. 34-38)

[34] And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. [35] “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. [36] “For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? [37] “For what will a man give in exchange for his soul? [38] “For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”

This is Jesus, on life.¹⁵

Paradoxically, the only way to ensure that you will lose your life - the real YOU! - is to devote yourself to saving yourself. The only way to finding LIFE is to lose it for Jesus.

¹⁵ Each time we see “life” or “soul” in these verses, it is a translation of the same Greek word, “psyche.” It can refer to the physical life of a person (which it certainly does in verse 35). But it can also refer to the inner life/soul of a person, the essential person who lives on after the body dies (which it seems to refer to in verses 36-37).

And this is true for you and for every person you know.

Conclusion:

You who are here today and have never placed the treasure of your trust in Jesus, recognize who Jesus is. He is the Suffering Servant Messiah who not only went around performing miracles, but also gave Himself on a cross for you.

He suffered rejection and loss and torture for you. He gave up His life so that you might have life. To reject Him, the Rejected One, will result in your eternal loss.

There is no future in a life without Jesus. Jesus was speaking to people in the crowd that day who were on the fence about whether or not to follow Him. You might be on that same fence today.

Today, right now, Jesus is calling on you to jump off the fence. Follow Him! And the first step in following Jesus for you is to stop trusting whatever you have been trusting to save your life - to find forgiveness, to have eternal life - and put your trust in Him!

And you who have placed your trust in Jesus for salvation, you who know Jesus as your Savior/King/Messiah - follow Him.

He *deserves* and *demand*s your full-hearted followership.

And get this. To follow Jesus - even when following Him seems to contradict your best interests - is the path to the abundant life He has promised.

Following Him into self-denial will result in joy. Following Him into pain and rejection will lead to peace. Following Him into holiness will make you a loving person.

To NOT follow Him is the path of folly. Choose to disobey Him and you'll regret it. Choose selfishness and you'll find loneliness. Choose rebellion in family life, in business dealings, in relationships and you'll find pain and loss.

And, as Jesus says here, be ashamed of Him now and He'll be ashamed of you when He returns in glory.

Choose this day to follow Jesus, no matter where He leads, and discover the abundant life He has promised!