ReMARKable: Rebuke! (Chapter 8) Memory Verse: Mark 8:34

March 2nd, 2025 Scripture Reading: Mark 8

**[SLIDE 1]**

In last week’s chapter, Mark delved deep into the controversy surrounding the issue of cleanness and uncleanness. **[SLIDE 2]** The Jewish leaders had a very specific program that every faithful Jew was to follow in order to ensure ritual purity. One could not please God or come into his presence unless they were ritually pure. And purity was all about what you touched, and who you were around and especially what you ate. In every part of life, one should be concerned about their status when it comes to one’s state of purity.

But, at the dinner table, Jesus radically established a new way. According to Jesus, purity had nothing to do with the externals and what goes into our bodies, and everything to do with the internals, and what comes out of our hearts. This is the rubric God cares about. People, places, and foods are not defiled, but rather the thoughts and actions that spring from our own hearts…that is what brings defilement.

Jesus then proved out his point by casting out a demon from a Gentile woman’s daughter and healing a deaf man who was also a Gentile. These people were declared clean, and their faith had made them well.

Now, in chapter 8, we are going to see several instances of rebuke taking place. The word in Greek is **[SLIDE 3]** *epitimao* and it includes the sting of admonishment or bringing correction, but the preposition, *epi* means “over” or “above”. So *epitimao* also carries with it a sense of superiority. If I am rebuking you, I am above you. I am speaking down to you. We are going to keep this in mind as we come across a few instances of rebuke in this chapter.

Right away, in verse 1, we have Jesus teaching another crowd, the day is coming to a close and there is no food. As readers we are experiencing déjà vu. We have been here before. We have a pretty good idea of what is going to happen here. And, sure enough, it is a repeat of the story we saw in chapter 6. **[SLIDE 4]** Jesus breaks up the crowd into groups, he sits them down, and remember the word used there is “recline”. He seats the people as though they were attending a banquet and reclining at the table. He breaks what little bread and fish are present and they begin passing it all around until everyone has eaten their fill. Overall, we have the same story, in fact, some scholars take it to be another account of the same event. But there are some important differences we should note here.

There are a few more loaves of bread to begin with, five in the last story and seven in this one. There are less people to feed. 4,000 here and 5,000 last time. And the amount left over is noted: 12 baskets leftover previously and seven left over this time.

**[SLIDE 5]** Now, it is hard to know exactly what to make of the slight differences in these two accounts. but I think one of the major differences actually comes from the geography of the event. Jesus feeds the crowd of 5,000 somewhere along the **[SLIDE 6]** northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee. But here, with the 4,000, Jesus is located somewhere around the area of the Decapolis **[SLIDE 7]**. We read about that in chapter seven verse 31. If that is the case, then we see Mark sticking with his theme: **[SLIDE 8]** Jesus is working in Gentile territory. Jesus is making available the blessings and provision of God even to those who fall outside of the designation of being his “Chosen People”. The miraculous bread is offered to Israel first as we have already seen and here now, it is offered to the world beyond. A banquet for Israelites followed by a banquet for Gentiles.

((Mark then tells us Jesus moves on to Dalmanutha, and this is a location that is **[SLIDE 9]** unknown to us today. I think it is safe to assume that we are back within the bounds of Israelite territory because right away, in verse 11, Jesus is confronted by some **[SLIDE 10]** Pharisees who demand that Jesus performs a sign. They want to see some jaw-dropping sort of miracle that will prove once and for all that Jesus is really sent by God.

Jesus sighs, he lets out a deep groan. He knows the true heart of these teachers. They are not really looking for a sign. If proof were put before them, they would figure out a way to deny what they see. These are the same people who have already witnessed the miraculous power of God and have concluded that it was the work of demons! **[SLIDE 11]** There are still folks today who fall into this category. They claim that if God were real, then surely, he would prove himself and make himself known. All they need, before they believe, is a little bit of proof. But, Jesus, in this first rebuke, refuses to even engage with this state of heart. **[SLIDE 12]** He flat out refuses and leaves in a boat.

This is a moment of learning for us. All along we have seen Jesus stop to take time to heal people or feed people or, if they are opposed to him, he has always answered the argument or taught a new point of doctrine. But in this case, Jesus basically turns and walks away. No sign will be given…it’s as simple as that. One thing we can learn from this interaction, or lack thereof, is the fact that faith does not follow proof. If something is proved out, then faith becomes nullified. **[SLIDE 13]** We have faith first. Our faith is the proof that that which we hope for is, in fact a reality. To say Jesus is the Christ is first and foremost a statement of faith, a statement that will be proven when he finally does return at the end of all days. Until then, we accept him as the Messiah, the Son of God, in faith. Faith does not demand proof, rather it is, in itself, all the proof needed.))

With the disappointment of these heard hearts on his mind, Jesus joins his disciples and , in verse 15, **[SLIDE 14]** warns them to beware the yeast or leaven of the Pharisees. Leaven was seen as a fermenting agent, something that brings about putrefaction. It was always associated with evil. But the disciples are confused. They assume Jesus is commenting on the fact that they forgot to bring bread with them on their journey. And here we see the second rebuke from Jesus, and it comes in the form of a series of questions: **[SLIDE 15]**

Why are you talking about bread? Jesus is disappointed that their minds are still so focused on earthly, material things. Don’t you understand what has happened? Don’t you have ears and eyes? Can’t you hear and see what God is doing? Then Jesus pivots to a bit of a memory quiz: When I fed the five thousand, how many baskets were left? **[SLIDE 16]** “Twelve” they reply with the correct answer. “And how many left over from the 4,000?” “Seven” they are correct again.

“And you still don’t understand?” It’s as though Jesus is saying, “You have all the information you need, how can you be missing the point? You have all the information you need to work out the problem, all the factors are in place, so can’t you come up with the answer?”

It is in this moment maybe more than any other so far in Mark’s gospel where we as the readers are transposed directly into the text. Jesus’ question **[SLIDE 17]** “You still don’t understand?” lands directly on us. And we are forced to admit… “No? No, Lord, I really wish I did, but I…I admit, I do not understand. I see the twelve baskets and then the seven baskets, and I gather you are not concerned with actual loaves of bread, but I am fully in the same boat as these disciples…I do not understand.”

And Mark is less than helpful. He drops the whole thing **[SLIDE 18]** and moves on to another episode just leaving us hanging with this rebuke from Jesus. Or does he? Maybe there is some sort of answer in the following story about a blind man in Bethsaida. As far as the healing story goes, it is all pretty typical of what we have already seen, except for one important detail. In verse 24, **[SLIDE 19]** the man tells Jesus he can see people but, for some reason, they appear to him as walking trees. Jesus tries again and then the man’s vision is fully restored.

Why the two-step healing process? We have never come across such a thing with Jesus before. What is clear is that Jesus is in the business of restoring the ability to see, and who do we know that is currently in need of clarity? His disciples…and for that matter, we are too. This is a story about a blind man finding healing, but in the background, it is also a story about the state of **[SLIDE 20]** our blindness. We can see and understand certain things about Jesus. We know him and we love him and so we follow him but, at the same time, we are in need of a second touch from the Lord. We see dimly. We are not in complete darkness but our sight is still imperfect. It’s like we see people as walking trees. We need a second touch.

And in the rest of this passage, we see that second touch that comes to clarify the full picture of who Jesus is. Verse 27 Jesus and his crew are now in Caesarea Philippi, **[SLIDE 21]** 24 miles north of the Sea of Galilee. This is an important city, filled with temples and landmarks all idolizing the Roman gods and the great Emperor. It is with this grand pagan city as a backdrop that Jesus takes stock of where his students are. How far have they progressed? Has he made any headway as their teacher? So, Jesus ventures a warm-up question: **[SLIDE 22]**“Who do people say I am?”

“Some say Elijah, or John the Baptist or some other prophet.”

“Hmmm, that is interesting. Good to know. But what about you all? Who do you say that I am?”

Peter pipes up, **[SLIDE 23]** “You are the Christ!” We know this is the right answer, we have known since the first verse of Mark’s gospel. But even though Peter is correct, once again, Jesus demands that they keep this information quiet. And he began to teach them some new things about himself. He began to lay upon him the painful second touch, the touch that brings clarity and fully restores their sight.

**[SLIDE 24]** He proclaims that as the Son of Man, he will be rejected and killed and rise again after three days. It is important to note here in verse 32 that Jesus is **[SLIDE 25]** speaking plainly. This is not a parable; this is not a riddle. No math needs to be worked out. These are the facts. Peter objects. After all, if he was right in calling Jesus the Christ, then this series of events cannot possibly be correct. The Messiah will be a conquering king who vanquishes his enemies. So, Peter, bold as he is, steps in to correct Jesus. Mark says he took it upon himself to rebuke Jesus. And in so doing, he puts himself above Jesus. Mark does not tell us exactly what he said, but surely Peter was attempting to correct Jesus’ misunderstanding of the role of the Messiah. Jesus is quick to put Peter in his place. **[SLIDE 26]** The rebuke comes back upon him as Jesus refers to Peter as Satan! Peter, the future leader of the Church, Peter, the close friend, Peter the bold believer has spews out the very words of Satan and reflects a human way of thinking about God’s plan. Pastor and author Peter Bellini comments on this rebuke. He writes, “Satan loves a cross-less spiritual diet. He has taken away our main weapon to defeat him! When Peter told Christ he did not have to die at the cross, Jesus rebuked Satan, who was talking through Peter. Satan created a cross-less gospel and was the first to preach it. Satan tempted Peter with a cross-less gospel. And Satan did not want Christ to go to the cross.”

Now, in verse 34, Jesus calls together a crowd, again speaking plainly to all the people. And with this second touch, he reveals all that following him entails. **[SLIDE 27]** READ 34-38. Jesus talks to these people about denying themselves and taking up their cross. But Jesus, a cross is for criminals, criminals who are under God’s curse. This is the most extreme and terrible outcome that could be imagined. And yet this is what is in the cards for one of your disciples? If we try to save our own life, we will lose it, but if we lose our lives for his sake, then we will be saved. It sounds like we can either have the world and what it offers, or we can have our souls… **[SLIDE 28]** not both. And there is an enduring wrinkle to living ashamed of the Messiah in this life...he will return the favor when he comes in glory and it actually matters. This teaching is the core of discipleship. It is not a pretty picture or an easy road. It is the second touch, the clarity we need. We might well prefer to live with obscured vision. The truth can hurt too much. It is easier to live in the dark, to claim ignorance. But Jesus does not allow for fair-weather disciples. He drives home the nitty-gritty details of what **[SLIDE 29]** following after him will look like. Are we willing to live with such clear vision? Are we willing to embrace verses 34-38 as our normal mode of life? When we don’t fully understand, are we willing to follow after Jesus and cling to him until we do understand? Are we willing to suffer as he suffered? To love as he loved? The call to follow after Jesus as his disciple is the hardest call we could ever answer. It is all encompassing. We don’t get to clock-out. We don’t get to relax. The call is to deny ourselves. It’s the final rebuke of this chapter. When our bodies cry out for rest, when our minds cry out for certainty, when our hearts long for comfort and security and lack of conflict and warm feelings, we sternly deny such demands. “No, I am not here for comfort’s sake or an easy life. I am here to expend myself on behalf of my Savior. If I suffer, then I suffer for his glory, if I prosper, then I give the proceeds to those in need.” God gave us life to spend, and not to keep. Willaim Barclay puts it well, “It is better to burn out than to rust out.” Let’s us get to work spending, and giving, and working away this life that God has given us. We rebuke our heart’s inclinations, we deny ourselves, we take up our cross, and we follow him. This is the radical way of discipleship. It’s the clarifying call of Christ. His way is our way.

**[SLIDE 30]** And with this passage, we have reached the center point of Mark’s gospel. Thus far, he has shown us who Jesus is, the power and authority that Jesus commands, the heart with which Jesus operates. We have seen who Jesus is, now in the coming second half, Mark will report to us what Jesus must do. From here on out, sights are set on Jerusalem and the events that transpire in that holy city as they concern the holy One of God. This idea of a suffering and dying Messiah all begin to play out now.

Again, we take on the role of the disciples. Are we willing to follow Jesus even through the things that he must face? May our answer be a resounding yes! We agree with Peter, Jesus is the Christ, and we agree with Jesus, that as Christ, he must suffer and die and rise again. As his disciples, as those who take up their cross and follow, all three of these steps also apply to us. We too suffer, we too die and we too will rise again! Amen.