

**W@W081**

## **Word@Work from BeaconLight**

**Read Mark 7:1-4** *The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered round Jesus and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were "unclean", that is, unwashed. (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. When they come from the market-place they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.) (NIV)*

We should applaud hygienic hands. But the Pharisees had no notion of transmissible bacterial infection - if they had, then the hand washing regime would have been much more rigorous! Centuries of Jewish tradition had produced increasing layers of lifestyle rules, by which the Jews thought that they were pleasing God ... even though He had never asked them to do so!

These religious rituals became the mark of respectability, and Jesus was supposed to measure up to them. The failure of His disciples to play the game was greeted by criticism, and became a 'reason' to reject the Son of God (even though He was fully obedient to His Father). All their rules were about what could be seen on the outside, whereas Jesus wanted to see a clean inside. And dribbling a little water over the hands could never do that. It is much easier to invent rules that we can keep rather than face up to God's demands for a pure heart and sin-free soul.

Even today, freshly ironed Sunday clothes are no substitute for a clean heart: nor can eloquent praying replace obedience. Man keeps looking on the outward appearance, while God is keenly scrutinising each of our hearts. As always it is easier to detect the speck in another's eye, while being blind oneself. If you have not given up anything for Lent - try giving up criticism today! Self-righteousness is a terrible disease for any Christian, and hugely off-putting for a sin-sick world. But perhaps its worst effect is that some people think that they can reach God but playing the games that they might see in the church. Food for thought?

**Prayer:** *Heavenly Father. Thank You that You don't want anybody to play religious games, but to submit to Jesus as Lord and Master. Help me to live in such a way that others can see who I am obeying deep down in my heart. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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**W@W082**

## **Word@Work from BeaconLight**

**Read Mark 7:5-8** *So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with 'unclean' hands?" He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: "'These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.' You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men." (NIV)*

It is easy to make others look silly, when they don't conform to an accepted social standard. But Jesus agreed with Isaiah's prophecy that hypocrisy was endemic (people might say they obeyed God, but really have had no intention of doing so). They cherished what God did not want; and despised what He commanded. Rather than holding tight to what God said, they let it slip through their fingers. They did not love what matters to God - a sure sign of the 'heart trouble', that would prove eternally fatal!

Jesus grasped the core of the problem: who should say what is acceptable? Clearly, God has the right to make the rules. But because we find His standard so high, we make ourselves feel better by inventing rules we can keep. Every Christless religion does this, and even Christians can be tempted to do the same. Terrible! Especially as Jesus takes the provocative step of declaring their worship to be unacceptable.

This should not only spur our own consciences, but also educate our evangelism and discipleship. The Gospel does not set out to make people behave nicely, but to change their hearts. Every Gospel bearer should make a high priority of living out what God says: that (according to Romans 12:1) is real worship. As most of us live unthinkingly on a moral-autopilot, it would not do any harm to ask the key questions, "Why am I doing what I do?", and, "Is this what God wants me to do?"

**Prayer:** *Almighty God. I often happily agree with what you say, and even tell others. But I need to be certain that I am doing what You want me to do. Please help me to take the time to see truth in Your Word and reflect that in my prayers - as I ask for Your help, without which I cannot obey Your Word and so worship You. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

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**W@W083**

## **Word@Work from BeaconLight**

**Read Mark 7:9-13** *And he said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! For Moses said, 'Honour your father and your mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban' (that is, a gift devoted to God), then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that." (NIV)*

Corban was a sort of religious tax-avoidance scheme. In those days, there was no pension or social security payment for the elderly, except for whatever their offspring could provide. Despite all the love and expensive care lavished by parents on their children, some grown up children did not want to repay the investment. By declaring all their assets to be 'Corban', they effectively put them into a 'trust' that their parents could not touch - by saying that the money was for God (although it was really for whatever purpose they wanted, declaring it to be 'holy' money).

Jesus saw right through this hypocrisy. He pointed out that 'honouring parents' is not just a verbal nicety, but a practical, physical and financial responsibility. To ignore this duty is to ignore God. By placing this tradition above God's Word, they showed how little they thought of God. Paradoxically, if the tradition was 'handed down', it may have been the way their parents treated their grandparents! Jesus continued his assault on their hypocrisy by exposing similar behaviour in other areas of life.

The ability of self-centred people to avoid their God-given responsibility is breathtaking. Care of dependent parents can be totally delegated to 'homes' with only the occasional visit. Money for mission, competes with money for me; while our homes get makeovers although the church is still shabby. "And you do many things like that", is a searching sideswipe at our ego-centric culture. How would we respond if Jesus were physically here?

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord, it is so good that I can never pull the wool over Your eyes. You see it all! Please show me where I am in danger of becoming like these Pharisees - ignoring obvious responsibilities and making the reason sound spiritual, In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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**W@W084**

## **Word@Work from BeaconLight**

**Read Mark 7:14-15** *Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him 'unclean'." (NIV)*

In 1791, John Wesley wrote: "Slovenliness is no part of religion. Cleanliness is indeed next to Godliness." He meant that respect for God should result in personal disciplines - habits that honoured the body and life that God had given. But for the Jews around Jesus, ceremonial cleanliness was the way to get God to honour them! It was a sort of obsessional compulsive behaviour that marked their deranged thinking - the result of false teaching welcomed by DIY ('if I do it I will stay in control') spirituality.

Jesus had a big point to make. Uncleaness was not about food hygiene, it came from pollution that was already in the 'heart'. The 'heart' is, of course, not the physical blood pump, but the part of us that holds our deep desires. An unclean desire will soon be seen; it will find expression in what we say and do, and how we relate to others. God sees the depth of our rottenness, but everyday life reveals our hearts, in its challenges, conflicts and ambitions.

We may not be obsessive about the Old testament food laws, but we may have all sorts of religious habits that we hope will cover up the reality of our hearts. Even energetic ministry to children, devotion at the prayer meeting or serving as a church officer ... none of these are a substitute for getting our hearts right with God. Perhaps that might be a focus of our attention this week before Easter - because we really do need to be usable in the work of the Gospel, don't we?

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord. Thank you for this fresh opportunity to think about the state of my heart and its desires. Help me to be honest with You and to be willing to let You point out where deep cleaning is needed. I cannot do that myself or in my own strength, but I do want to repent of sin and be restored to full usefulness. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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## Word@Work from BeaconLight

**Read Mark 7:17-23** *After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. "Are you so dull?" he asked. "Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'? For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body." (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean".) He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean'. For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean'." (NIV)*

Jesus rebuked them for being dull. Dullness, here, is not an intellectual weakness: it is dullness-of-sight ... the inability to see truth after spending so long in spiritual darkness. They had languished under the burden of relationless religion, and so they had lost their ability to see what pleased the Lord. In their obsession with ceremonial washing before meals (that was unlikely to remove many bacteria anyway), they missed the point that God was looking for clean hearts.

Jesus is concerned about what comes out of people's hearts ... because what comes out, in behaviour, simply reveals what is already lurking there. The long list of wrong behaviour and habits start with wrong thoughts and end in folly: and the characteristic of a fool is that he lives as though there is no God (cf [Psalm 14:1](#)). When a heart is not filled with the presence of the living God, many evil desires can be at home there: and an outward veneer of religion is merely a comfort blanket to wickedness!

Hypocrisy, is the name Jesus gave to such a lifestyle - and religious people were in the glare of His searchlight. As we approach Easter, the liturgical words, "Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known and from whom no secrets are hidden ...", should spur us to reject the right of any evil desire to stay inside. That is much more important than layering another religious role or action on the outside of our busy lives.

**Prayer (from Psalm 139:23-24):** *Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. For Jesus' sake. Amen.*

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**W@W086**

## **Word@Work from BeaconLight**

**Read Mark 7:24-26** *Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an evil spirit came and fell at his feet. The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. (NIV)*

Jesus now relocates from Galilee to the Mediterranean coastal post of Tyre. It appears that He came specially for this one notable encounter, before returning to His home region. But He never sought popularity, unlike some religious leaders. Jesus was simply following His Father's timetable, to arrive at the cross at just the right moment (and along the way to demonstrate the amazing character of God) - while training up the future leaders of the church. But even though He did not seek recognition, those with a hunger for God to act in their lives, saw in Jesus all they were looking for.

An uncontrollable child was brought by a woman who would have been despised by respectable Jews. She was a Gentile, and her demonised child would have reflected badly on her. Yet, she knew that there was no other hope and that Jesus, if He would stoop to hear her, was fully able to exorcise the demon. She has no religious credentials: but she had a great need and a clear faith - she knew that Jesus has the power to act effectively.

Such simple faith may not be as rare as we think - it is just that the presence of Jesus may be so masked under a religious camouflage, that He may be invisible ... even in the church! The authentic presence of Jesus in His believers, should release pained cries for help from the needy. If they see Jesus in us, they will risk vulnerability to find an answer to their life. We should be expecting these encounters, and be ready to share the Gospel, and introduce them to our Saviour. Even at work!

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord. Thank You for Your power that is ready and willing to deal with the works of darkness. Help me to be aware that some people are looking for Jesus ... may they find Him with me. And help me to be ready to share His love and speak the truth of His Gospel, whenever the occasion demands. In Jesus'Name. Amen.*

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**W@W087**

## **Word@Work from BeaconLight**

**Read Mark 7:27-30** *"First let the children eat all they want," he told her, "for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs." "Yes, Lord," she replied, "but even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." Then he told her, "For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter." She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone. (NIV)*

At first sight, Jesus did not appear sympathetic to the Syro-Phoenician woman. He said that his time and ministry was first to be given to the Jews; indeed it would have been inappropriate for others to take that place. He was testing her. But she did not resent his use of 'dogs' to include her; and she did not argue with that description - she was indeed a dog, begging! Because even dogs were not denied the left-overs!

What a stunningly insightful comment. She may not have been an Old Testament theologian, but there was no doubt that she understood the purpose of God's mission to the world: His grace and mercy were for the Jews first, but also for the Gentiles. The power of God in Jesus was for all, and it included her! In simple terms, she was a believer in the Jesus who could send Satan away. And that was enough. The woman's daughter was found quietly lying on her bed, and the demon had gone.

Desperate but disciplined, unworthy but undeterred: that kind of prayer always reached God's heart. It was no tepid plea, it pursued the loving Jesus to act in accordance with His character. It offered no 'old school tie' or other cultural bargaining tool - but accepted utter unworthiness. The prayer simply begged that Jesus fulfil His role ... to dispossess Satan of his right to terrorise the little girl. Time we started praying like that? If you are in desperate circumstances - remember that desperation and unworthiness are a good starting point for prayer, when mixed with the confidence that the Lord has the power to deliver us from evil!

**Prayer (from Matthew 6:12-13):** *Heavenly Father. Please, lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil, for Yours is the Kingdom, and the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.*

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**W@W088**

## **Word@Work from BeaconLight**

**Read Mark 7:31-35** *Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man. After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spat and touched the man's tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means, "Be opened!"). At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly. (NIV)*

We should not ignore geography. Jesus kept moving, because He had business to do: announcing the kingdom of heaven, and training His disciples how to do the same. After healing the child of the gentile woman on the Mediterranean coast, He now he travels many miles to (what is now) Jordan, to heal a deaf-mute man. But why did Jesus travel so far for two gentile nobodies?

Jesus specialises in people that others despise. He loves them! This man could not speak because he had never heard: just like the Jewish nation who had no right to speak for God because they refused to listen to Him. Although his caring friends begged for a physical miracle, Jesus announced that he would do much more. "Ephphatha" - be completely opened - is God's command to every human heart. So here was a real-life drama to act out the message for the disciples. Friends brought the deaf man to Jesus, who used sign language to indicate what He would do ... and invited the man to believe in Him. The word of command was not audibly heard but as Jesus spoke, the Creator addressed His creation - and hearing came immediately. Clear speech then became natural.

For the disciples, as for us, the first evangelistic lesson is that everybody is deaf to the call of Jesus. But Jesus can and does break the sound barrier! When our friends and colleagues hear the Lord speaking to them, a miracle has taken place. I wonder how many of us beg the Lord to open the ears of our spiritually deaf friends and family. As He attracts their attention (using our introductions), so He issues an inaudible summons that they can hear! This should be another reminder to keep praying with urgency, and to keep introducing the spiritually deaf to Jesus ... shouldn't it!?

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord, thank You for this encouragement to beg you to speak to our friends. And as we do so, please help us to be effective in bringing them to You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

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**W@W089**

## **Word@Work from BeaconLight**

**Read Mark 7:36-37** *Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak." (NIV)*

There are few really good news stories today. But when they can be found, they are nectar to TV newscasters. They are trailed at the beginning of the News, but viewers are kept in suspense until the item is run - at the very end. It keeps people watching, because everybody is hungry for good news. And that is exactly what the Gospel is: Good News.

News of a deaf-mute man being healed, spread like wildfire through the secular Decapolis. Jesus was not on a promotional tour - in fact, He gave instructions not to tell anybody. The disciples were used to Jesus' style, but for the oppressed and poverty stricken citizens in occupied territory, this was a massive sign of deliverance. Just so - it was! They believed that the power of Jesus was so great and good that He could do 'all things well!' They were right!

In our relatively comfortable lifestyle, we often live as though we do not need Jesus. We manage to run our lives without Him. Day to day, we are rarely desperate enough to beg Jesus to intervene (cf v32): perhaps we regularly lose the wonder of our 'daily bread'. Maybe we also forget the, far greater, wonder of our salvation. Is that why we fail to even mention our wonderful Saviour, as each 24 hour cycle slips by? Without the adoration of worship, how can we expect to advertise Jesus to others.

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord. Thank you for this reminder to stop, to thank you for all you have done for me. Forgive me so many days of indifference to your amazing grace. Help me to be overwhelmed again, and then to be overflowing with my recommendations of Jesus. In His Name, Amen.*

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**W@W090**

## **Word@Work from BeaconLight**

**Read Mark 8:1-5** *During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance." His disciples answered, "But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?" "How many loaves do you have?" Jesus asked. "Seven," they replied. (NIV)*

This looks like a re-run of the feeding of the 5,000. But it is not, not really. It is a separate episode (see [Mark 8:19-21](#)), but so similar that the disciples should have been clued up ... alas they fell at the first hurdle. Jesus even sets them up to give the right answer - and they give the wrong one!

Knowing that Jesus wanted the crowd fed, and knowing that He had already fed 5,000 (see [Mark 6:35-44](#)), they should have turned to Him and said, "Master, we believe that you can feed them!" Instead, they complained that there were no bread shops for miles around. They had simply persisted in their worldly thinking, even though the King of heaven was with them. They were living next to Jesus, but His life was not inside them.

How many lessons, painfully learned, have we forgotten? What a lot of spiritual education has apparently gone to waste, as we make the same mistakes again and again. Today's passage might give us that healthy nudge to consider how the Lord has met with us (and in our circumstances) in the past. Instead of floundering at the next impossibility, it is a good idea to tell the Lord that you trust him to sort it (and that you are willing to cooperate!).

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord. Thank you for the many ways that you have displayed Your power in my life. Forgive me for forgetting, and for persisting in a lifestyle that assumes that You are not in control. Help me to trust you today, at work, and when I get back home. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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**W@W091**

## **Word@Work from BeaconLight**

**Read Mark 8:6-10** *He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. When he had taken the seven loaves and given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people, and they did so. They had a few small fish as well; he gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them. The people ate and were satisfied. Afterwards the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. About four thousand men were present. He got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha. (NIV)*

This simple narrative almost duplicates the amazing feeding of 5,000 (see [Mark 6:35-44](#)), only this time there were 4,000. The numbers changed but Jesus did not. His heart was still of compassion, His priority was to feed the soul, but His love wanted to meet their human hunger too. Once again, when Jesus fed people they were satisfied (soul and body), and once again there were plenty of leftovers for the disciples.

Mark could have saved column inches by ignoring this story: but he includes it to point to the stunning blindness of the disciples and the hardness of their hearts ([Mark 8:17-21](#)). However in today's passage, the disciples do not feature - just Jesus and His amazing power. What will the disciples do next?!

It is a good point at which to pause. If you are reading this at the beginning of the working day, please pause. What do you think that they should have done and said? Yes, they should have been full of praise for all that Jesus had done. So, is that true for you too ... as you face the next set of challenges and opportunities (in all of them the Lord Jesus can display His grace and glory), are you expecting Him to do so?

**Prayer:** *Father God. As I launch out into another series of challenge, help me to know that it is You who have placed me where I am, so that You may reveal Yourself for who you are. May Your Word stimulate me to expect that you will do 'immeasurably more than I can ask or imagine' ([Ephesians 3:20](#)), for Your glory's sake, Amen.*

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**W@W092**

## **Word@Work from BeaconLight**

**Read Mark 8:11-13** *The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven. He sighed deeply and said, "Why does this generation ask for a miraculous sign? I tell you the truth, no sign will be given to it." Then he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side. (NIV)*

Astonishing! After another miraculous feeding, religious leaders demanded a miraculous sign to prove who He was! What sort of sign did they want? Healings, exorcisms, banquets from nowhere? Jesus had all ready done all of these, and far more! But that is the problem with blindness - it cannot see ... even if the evidence is right under its nose. And spiritual blindness is rarely short of objective evidence.

Jesus refuses to play games. He knows that rejection of truth, hardens the heart. He had come to those who would welcome Him; and it was very important that the embryo leaders of the early church should learn that God does not play games, and that time for Gospel opportunity was short. Indeed, Jesus had already told them (see [Mark 6:11](#)) to move on and avoid getting bogged down by the hard hearted.

Although indifference is common today, it is not difficult to find some who are willing to ask questions. What should concern us is: what they do with the answers! It is tempting to stay with a small circle of friends - even if they all reject the truth or want to play games with us. But, why not look out for those who are starting to be hungry for Jesus? You will find them when you speak positively about your wonderful Saviour ... see their interest and listen for their responses ... and then find another opportunity to continue the conversation!

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord. Help me to distinguish those who are hungry for You, from those (with hardened hearts) who just want to play with ideas about You. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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**W@W093**

## **Word@Work from BeaconLight**

**Read Mark 8:14-16** *The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat. "Be careful," Jesus warned them. "Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod." They discussed this with one another and said, "It is because we have no bread." (NIV)*

Despite the miraculous feeding of another 4,000 - 12 grown men were arguing because they had forgotten to take more than one loaf of bread with them on the boat - even though Jesus was with them in the boat!!

Jesus warns them (kept giving them orders) to be always on their guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod. But they totally misunderstand: they think that Jesus is joining in their discussion about bread. What Jesus really meant was that as a small amount of yeast affected the whole dough (made it taste nicer but it would go off very quickly), so the habit of religious and civic leaders who demanded a sign from Jesus - could easily infect the disciples too. What the Lord was wanting was for His men to trust Him. And a breadless moment was a great opportunity!

How easily do we forget past blessings? What needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer! The absence of immediate provision worries us, even more than the presence of our Saviour comforts us! We grumble when somebody else forgets what we need; we avoid responsibility for our own shortcomings; we forget God's past blessings; then we may even point the finger at the Lord! Why? Surely it is because we are still living as worldlings (even if we do it 'religiously!'). Surely it is time for repentance and a personal reformation of our lifestyle. So let's start by thanking the Lord that He is with us, will never leave us, nor forsake us! Then we can honour Him by asking for our needs. Then our worship is expressed as we simply trust Him to do so.

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord, please forgive me for forgetting past mercies and previous blessings. Forgive me the habit of worry and blame, when You are right there beside me, at work and at home. Thank you that your powerful presence is with me right now, and that You promise never to leave me - this day or ever! Help me to trust you in my work and relationships today. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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**W@W094**

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**Read Mark 8:17-21** *Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" "Twelve," they replied. "And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" They answered, "Seven." He said to them, "Do you still not understand?" (NIV)*

When Jesus asks a question, it is not a sign of His ignorance, but to challenge thinking. The disciples are grumbling about inadequate food rations - just after 4,000 had been miraculously fed by their Master. So He fires eight questions at them. Asking about their moaning conversation, He shows that he has seen and heard it all. Then His probing unmask their foolish blindness. The connection between what they have seen and what it means, is glaringly absent. Even though they have been with Jesus so long, they just do not understand.

Understand what? They might have understood, after the second mass picnic, that Jesus could provide for them. But they have not got even that far! Their hearts were so hard, they were unable to respond to the God who made them. What they needed to understand, was not so much what Jesus could do for them, as, "who is this Jesus?" The presence of the Creator of the universe, Messiah of the Jews, King of heaven and Lamb of God - should have left them awestruck. But instead they were bothered about going hungry!

It is the same today. Receiving God's blessings is not the same as welcoming God's Saviour. Going to church does not mean we go to heaven. Everything hinges on who we believe Jesus is. That is the evangelistic challenge for every believer every day - to live and speak so that Jesus is known ... for who He really is.

**Prayer:** *Father God. Thank You for opening my eyes to see who Jesus is. Please help me to explain that to someone today, so that my friend/colleague may welcome Him as well. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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**Read Mark 8:22-26** *They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spat on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?" He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around." Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't go into the village." (NIV)*

In the previous passage the disciples could not understand to who Jesus was: they were blind to the truth. Now, the blind man's friends can see his problem, and beg Jesus to do something about it. But this healing miracle was done away from the glare of publicity, because Jesus wanted a personal encounter with the man. Note all the ways in which Jesus touched the man (took him by the hand / led him / put his hands on his eyes twice). He could not see Jesus, but he was willing to be in His hands. It was the right way to start a relationship with the Saviour.

This two phase miracle is not a weakness in Jesus' healing power, but shows how Jesus uses a variety of methods to do His work. At the same time, the man's faith grew. At first, people looked like moving trees, but when Jesus has finished with him, he had 20/20 vision. Seeing is the Bible's metaphor for understanding. And even though the disciples has been with Jesus and witnessed the miracles, they did not really know him.

Religion still obscures the person of Christ. Music can blind us to worship, activity can substitute for devotion, and even prayer can become a cold habit. However, allowing yourself to be in the hands of Jesus, and letting Him change you, can be really eye opening - as you find the real Jesus.

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus Christ. I thank you for all you have done for me, and I am sorry for the times I have failed to value You for who You are. I am willing to be in Your hands. Please work in my life through Your Word and by Your Spirit so that I can go to my friends and family - rejoicing in Your love. For Your Name's sake, Amen.*

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## **Word@Work from BeaconLight**

**Read Mark 8:27-30** *Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ." Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him. (NIV)*

'On the way', may sound like the introduction to a casual comment; but with Jesus, nothing is random or haphazard. As usual, the Master was teaching His future church leaders. And His questions plumbed their understanding. The identity of Jesus remains the most critical issue in the world, and everybody had an opinion then. The favourite was 'a prophet'. It was clear that He spoke with authority from God, and the miracles confirmed His words (cf [Acts 14:3](#)). Somehow, 'prophet' was a safe concept - you can buy into it, or not, if you want to.

But now, the spotlight was on the disciples - who do they think Jesus is? Peter speaks up boldly - 'the Christ' (Messiah)! What he did not realise, was that this confession was to be a matter of life or death for them: and Peter would soon be tested (before the cock crowed on crucifixion morning). It was so much life and death, that Jesus did not want this private confession to become public knowledge before His time had come.

The identity of Jesus, and whether people identify with Him, is life or death to every soul. Religious discussions may be safe, but they are so much hot air unless Jesus Christ is in the centre. Whatever people may think of us or church, it is only what they think about Jesus that ultimately matters. Strangely that is the one topic that seems frozen out of most Christian's conversation! So perhaps it is time to warm up your office and club discussions with, "Who do you think Jesus is?!" An open Bible is the only authority you have for the answers - so let your confidence grow!

**Prayer:** *Father God. I feel so privileged that I know who Jesus is - Your appointed Saviour of the world! Please help me to get my friends and colleagues thinking about the identity of Jesus, and give me courage to ask the crucial question. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

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**Read Mark 8:31-33** *He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." (NIV)*

After Peter's dramatic confession of the identity of Jesus, perhaps he expected a triumphant procession to start. But even before the transfiguration, Jesus has to teach the apostles that He was to be the Christ who suffered. To be glorified, yes: but to suffer was the first essential. These words really upset Peter. So much so that he dared to rebuke Jesus! His mind was so fixed on the power and the glory, that he could not see the necessity for the cross.

Jesus looked up from the private correction that Peter tried to administer; and rebuked Peter so severely, he would never forget it. Jesus exposed Peter's thinking as not only fleshly and worldly, but also devilish. Satan tried to use the apostle's mouth to deflect Jesus from His course (differently, Judas' mouth was used to betray Jesus, and confirm it with a kiss). Telling Peter to get out of His way, Jesus admonished him - his mind did not want the whole truth, even though he had correctly identified his Master.

The world certainly cannot see the point of the suffering of Jesus; but when someone does, it is life-changing! So to talk about Jesus as the kind teacher, or the powerful healer, is to miss the point. Jesus was so called, because he would 'save His people from their sins'. And that meant the cross. Omit that, and Satan has won a battle. A rebuke to us also?

**Prayer:** *Father God. Thank you that Jesus Christ suffered and died for me so that I could be at peace with you. Help me to be bold about sharing this truth - so that others may live in your love too. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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**Read Mark 8:34-38** *Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels." (NIV)*

After Jesus announced Himself as the suffering Christ, he then looked towards His disciples. If they were to keep on following, they would end up where He was going. The options were stark but real. True discipleship includes suffering as a part of the package (cf [Phil 1:29](#)). The cross Jesus talked about was the voluntary putting to death of self interest and self assertion - not some physical or relationship difficulty, however painful.

The disciples did not want to die, but Jesus said that those who were unwilling to die would not live; and those who accepted their cross, would live. To be ashamed of Jesus, meant that He would be ashamed of them on the day of glory. The soul is not built or kept by the best of this life - to try that route is to lose soul-relationship with God for ever. It seems a curious upside down world, in which life leads to death, but death leads to life. But that is the way of the cross - for Jesus and for us too.

Saving our skin is a natural ambition. The willingness to lose it for the Lord's sake (as many missionaries did 100+ years ago ... and many persecuted believers still do today), is only possible by a spiritual transformation - created by a passionate love for Christ. Anything less, is to be ashamed of the Saviour: and His verdict on that attitude is catastrophically final. There is some comfort by the restoration of the disciples (especially Peter) after the resurrection. But that should only serve to stimulate our repentance and renewed lifestyle, while there is time before Christ's return!

**Prayer:** *Gracious God. Thank you for your longsuffering attitude to my unwillingness to follow the Lord Jesus in His self denial and suffering for the gospel's sake. Please help me to repent and please work that transformation in my life so that I might desire to do Your will above all else. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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**Read Mark 9:1-4** *And he said to them, "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power." After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus. (NIV)*

What a rollercoaster of mind-bending teaching ([Mark 8:27-38](#)). First an apparently casual enquiry about who people thought Jesus was. Then came the direct question about the disciples' view on Jesus' identity; followed by Peter's confession; almost immediately followed by Peter's staggering rebukes to Jesus about the cross. Then Jesus not only rebuked his words as being Satanic but told all the disciples that they were to suffer too! Now the ball comes over the net with heavy top-spin - there is a promise of glory followed by its amazing sight! Unforgettable! And just as intended.

Like every good military leader, Jesus allowed his troops to have a glimpse of the final victorious goal before committing themselves to the battle. The sight of Jesus in the white of purity and victory was to encourage them in the dark days ahead. The arrival of Elijah and Moses brought Job's conviction to life ([Job 19:26](#)) and provided the hope of life after death for all believers. It also confirmed what Jesus had said: 'those who lose their life for me and the gospel will save it' ([Mark 8:35](#)).

Without the Bible record we would be ignorant about such things. We would be left to flounder in mystery and superstition. But we do have the information - and it is designed to give us hope. Whatever we may be called to sacrifice for the sake of Christ, we can be confident that when the Lord comes in all his Glory, believers will not be left behind or cut out of the great celebration. We will be included and glorified with him for ever. Such a confident hope was the backbone of the 1st century church - and every church in persecution. It still says that Jesus and the Jesus people win in the end - and therefore it is worth the sacrifice of everything!

**Prayer:** *Father God. Thank you for this reminder that there is more to life than what we see on planet Earth. Thank you for Your promise of the Glory ahead, in the presence of Jesus for ever ... and with nothing at all that will spoil it, never! Help me to live through difficulty and trials with this confidence as my hope - encouraging me in the day of sacrifice and spurring my soul to greater devotion. For Jesus' sake. Amen.*

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**Read Mark 9:5-8** Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters - one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.) Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" Suddenly, when they looked round, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. (NIV)

It is good advice, that, "when you don't know what to say, don't say it!" Peter was too impetuous for that. Or perhaps his recent stinging rebuke from Jesus, mixed with pride, precipitated this thoughtless outburst in an attempt to appear 'on-side'. With Jesus flanked by Moses and Elijah, Peter might have thought this was the beginning of Christ's reign on earth. There was no time to build a palace, but a tent could be constructed out the brush wood. It would honour them and 'own' them. The patronage of the disciples would cover the visitors leaving them indebted for the hospitality!

Not so. It was God who was in control that day (as He is every day)! The divine cloud that swallowed them up spoke to the trio of disciples. God said that Jesus was His Son and that they were to listen to Him (not argue with Him!). As soon as the shining sight had appeared, it went again. Jesus only was left. They had no need of the cloud or Moses or Elijah - they simply pointed forwards to Jesus. Christ was enough and all sufficient; He alone could bring them through the cross to the glory.

It has become fashionable to debate the merits of Jesus, placing Him alongside prophets and gurus. But God's word to us is, "Listen to him!" We should do so because: He is God the Son; because the Father's love for Him is so intense that anyone who slights Jesus, has the Father's wrath to face; and because God commands us to listen. Why not get your Bible out and show a friend or colleague what Jesus says? After all the discussions, your friend needs to listen to Jesus!

**Prayer:** Father God. You have commanded me to listen to Jesus, so I know I must. Help me to realise the seriousness of your instruction, and its eternity changing impact on me and my family and friends. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

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