

## STUDY 5

# WHO DO YOU SAY I AM?

[MARK 6:45-8:30]

IN OUR LAST STUDY WE SAW THE contrast between Jesus and Israel's leadership. With the arrival of Jesus, God is coming to replace the corrupt and failed leadership of Israel with his own good shepherd in the line of David.

All the while, we the readers know who Jesus really is. Mark has told us from the very first sentence of the book that Jesus is God's Messiah, the king, come to bring God's long-awaited kingdom.

However, for the characters in the story—like the disciples, the crowds, the people Jesus meets, his family, the religious authorities—it's not so simple. They are still trying to work out exactly what is going on, and just who this amazing man is. Some of them will get

it right. Others won't.

This is another constant theme throughout these chapters—will the characters work out who Jesus really is? In particular, will the disciples, with whom we identify most, put their trust in Jesus? Or will they be hard-hearted and go the way of the Pharisees? And what about us? How will we respond?

### The heart problem

In chapter 6, Jesus crosses the sea for a second time with his disciples (as he did in chapter 4:35-41, and as he will again in chapter 8:13-21). Once again, he astounds them by revealing himself to them in a unique way.

**Read Mark 6:45-56.**

1. Modern readers without a solid Old Testament background may miss some of the points that Mark makes as he describes this event. Look up the following Old Testament references that add meaning to the incident. Remember that this is not a matter of proof-texting, but recognizing that Mark is deliberately using language (describing what Jesus actually did) which should spark off Old Testament images in your mind. As the picture builds up, draw your own conclusions: Who is this man?

- He walked on the sea: Psalm 77:19
- He was about to pass them by: Exodus 33:19, 22; 34:6-7
- He provoked fear: Exodus 20:18-21
- He told them not to fear: Isaiah 41:13, 43:1-3, 44:2
- He said "It is I" or, better translated, "I AM": Exodus 3:14; Isaiah 41:4
- He seemed to calm the wind: Psalm 65:7, 107:25-30
- Who is this man?

2. Why do the disciples respond as they do? What is their problem?

3. Go back and quickly re-read the first sea-crossing incident in Mark 4:35-41. Have the disciples progressed at all in their understanding?

**Read Mark 7:1-30.**

4. What is the real problem with the religious leaders?

5. How do Jesus' disciples compare with the religious leaders (remember 4:40, 6:52)?

6. The Syrophenician woman is a Greek. As Jesus points out to her, she is a foreigner to Israel. She is one of the 'dogs', one of the unclean, with whom Jews were not to associate. Given all this, how does the woman's response to Jesus compare with those we have just seen? What is the state of her heart?

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## Hearing and sight problems

Read Mark 7:31–8:26.

7. What is your impression of the disciples' response to Jesus during the feeding of the four thousand incident? Has anything changed since the feeding of chapter 6 (cf. 6:52)?
8. In 8:17–21, Jesus asks the disciples to compare the two feeding incidents. What trend is occurring?
9. It is in the context of this decline that Jesus tells his disciples to beware the leaven of the Pharisees. How are the disciples being affected by the leaven of the Pharisees (cf. 6:52, 7:17–18, 8:21)?
10. What is unusual about the healing of the blind man (8:22–26)? How is this a picture of the disciples?

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11. Look again at the stories that surround this conversation in the boat (7:31–37, 8:22–26). If the disciples are ever to understand, what must happen to them?

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## The solution

IN THE MARVELLOUS WAY THAT MARK weaves together the different strands of his account, a stunning picture emerges—not only of the compassionate majesty and power of Jesus, but also of the quite incredible hostility of the religious authorities, and the baffling stupidity of his closest associates.

The disciples just do not understand. God himself has come amongst them, the promises of Scripture are being fulfilled, yet Jesus' own followers—like Israel's leaders—are too dull to see it. Both the deaf mute and the blind man are pictures of the disciples. They have ears but do not hear. They have eyes but do not see. They

need someone to heal them, to open the deaf ears and blind eyes.

Fortunately for the disciples, there is someone among them who can do just that. And in the following passage (8:27–30), this is what happens. Like the mute whom Jesus healed, Peter's tongue is loosened and he begins to speak plainly. He confesses what we (as readers) have known all along: "You are the Christ". At last, the disciples openly recognize who Jesus is.

This is the climax of the Gospel thus far. As we shall see, it is also the turning point, for from this point on the story takes an amazing twist.

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## » Implications

(Choose one or more of the following to think about further or to discuss in your group.)

- We tend to think of the Pharisees as the 'bad guys' in the story. But what would have been their standing in the community of their day? How do you think they would have been regarded?

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- The disciples were for a time just like the Pharisees and Herod. Have you seen people reacting to Jesus like this?

- What is necessary before people can understand who Jesus is?

- How does this make you think about:

- your own knowledge of Jesus?

- how you can help other people who don't know Jesus?

### » Give thanks and pray

- Thank God for the fact that, through Jesus, hard hearts, blind eyes and deaf ears can be healed.
  - Ask God to open the eyes and ears of those you know who don't know Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.
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## » STUDY 6

# WHAT MUST I DO?

[MARK 8:27-10:52]

SO FAR IN MARK'S STORY, WE HAVE witnessed the arrival of the king—that is, Jesus, God's Messiah. Even the slow-witted disciples have begun to realize this.

But what sort of kingdom is Jesus

about to establish? How will he do it? And what does he want from his followers?

As we shall see in this study, these questions are all related. And as Jesus begins to answer them, the disciples are in for a surprise.

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### Read Mark 8:27-9:1.

1. What does Peter now see (v. 29)?

2. What does he not yet see (vv. 31-33)?