

# Meet Jesus: It's a Romantic Encounter

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[ 0 : 00 ] So we come to our reading now, which is, you'll find it in the Visitor's Bibles. It's Mark chapter 8, verses 22 to 30, and David Roba is going to read it for us.

I don't know how many of you look at our website, but David is responsible for the planning and the management of our website and numerous other things within the life of our church.

For example, at the moment, we're obviously going to be moving up the road to 25 Bath Street from the middle of August, and David has been involved with the audio systems and the relay that's going to be installed with that.

But David won't be with us at St. George's Tron for a lot longer. Why is that, David? Could you tell us? Julie, my wife and I are heading off to Nairobi in about a month and a half to begin training for two years to be Bible translators.

Uh-huh. And has that been a long process? It's been something where God has sown seeds in the past, an interest in people from other cultures, and an interest in God's word spreading throughout the world, and he's just brought it together so that we can be absolutely sure, really, that he's prepared us for this, and he's prepared this college for us to go to.

[ 1 : 29 ] Yeah. Isn't that great? It's like Acts chapter 2, and the gospel alive and going out around the world into different languages and cultures. David, if we could pray for one thing, if you told us one thing that we could be praying for so that we can remember it and take it home with us, what would that be?

If you could pray maybe a long-term thing that we would set good patterns as we go and as we study for our longer-term work that we would seek to glorify God in everything we do.

I think that would really cover everything, and that would be most important. There are smaller things, important though they are, to do with visa, travel, and everything like that.

But if you pray that we would glorify God in our relationship together and work well together under the stress of getting ready to go. I think I managed to say about five things there. That's great.

It's the chief end of man, isn't it? To glorify God. It's the Westminster Confession. So we should be able to remember that, David. So we look forward to hearing God's word now.

[ 2 : 47 ] Thank you. So we're looking at page 844, Mark chapter 8, just on the left-hand side there if you've got a visitor's Bible.

Chapter 8, verse 22. And they, that is Jesus and his disciples, came to Bethsaida, and some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him.

And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village. And when he had spat on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, Do you see anything?

And he looked up and said, I see men, but they look like trees walking. Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again and he opened his eyes.

His sight was restored and he saw everything clearly. And he sent him home, sent him to his home saying, Do not even enter the village.

[ 3 : 50 ] And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way, he asked his disciples, Who do people say that I am?

And they told him, John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others, one of the prophets. And he asked them, But who do you say that I am?

Peter answered him, You are the Christ. And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him. Thank you, David.

So in this passage, Peter's worked out, hasn't he, who Jesus is.

And many of us here, this afternoon, we know who Jesus is, don't we? And we might be thinking to ourselves, we might be thinking, Well, I don't need to decide who he is anymore.

[ 4 : 53 ] But friends, we all sin, don't we? And so we need to get to know him better. Am I right?  
Chapter 8.

And we've reached a critical and exciting part of Mark's gospel. From chapter 1, verse 1, Mark's had this passage in mind.

He's been crafting his gospel so that we arrive here with Peter, we meet him on the road to Caesarea Philippi. In our passage, there's two groups of people and there's two miracles.

First of all, two groups. There's the people in general and there's those that Jesus is speaking to personally.

And we'll see that in verses 22 and 23 if you have a look. And they came to Bethsaida and some people, do you see, that's people generally, brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him.

[ 5 : 58 ] And he took the blind man by the hand, you see, the intimacy, and led him out of the village. So Jesus moves from the people in general to a person.

And we'll see this also in the next section. If you think about it, Jesus says, who do people say I am? And he's thinking about people in general or perhaps more specifically the Jewish people.

And then he looks at his disciples, doesn't he? That intimate bunch that he's had with him for about three years. He says, who do you say I am? So it's from those on the outside to those on the inside.

And friends, Jesus has drawn you here today. He's drawn you out of the crowds to hear his voice. And perhaps you can see it in your life.

You know, perhaps the patterns of your life in recent times. He's had to put into place a whole series of events so that he can meet with us, so that you and he have a rendezvous.

[ 7 : 06 ] Two groups. And we move now to two miracles. Our passage has two incidents, doesn't it? The healing of the blind man and Peter's confession.

And you could sort of line the passages up against each other. You could put them in two separate columns. Just have a look with me at the passage. You'll see the first one, verses 22 to 26.

It's headed, Jesus heals a blind man at Bethsaida. And then the second passage, Peter, the second paragraph, Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ from 27 to 30.

So you could place them side by side. Just imagine, like a pair of stereo speakers. You could put them there. It's like the first, think about this, is functioning as a parable.

And the second is the truth that it's dialoguing with. I hope you're with me. And Mark's using them both. Two paragraphs doing the one job. And let's see, let's see how they work together.

[ 8 : 08 ] This man wants his sight, doesn't he? It's a little bit like my parking. Backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, fits and starts.

You know, I look in the mirror when I'm on West George Street on Sunday and the bus driver's beginning to get impatient. You know, is it a bad day for Jesus? A bad day at the office?

Was it the healing of the 4,000? It's taken it out of him. We think not, don't we? And we have to ask ourselves, listen, what does this healing add to our understanding of Peter's confession in the following paragraph?

You see, well, Mark could have left it out, couldn't he? We've already had a series of spectacular hearings. We're absolutely in no doubt about Jesus' power at this point.

You might have noticed in Mark's Gospel that the word immediately is like a refrain all the way through. Immediately, immediately. This is anything but, isn't it? Anything but immediately.

[ 9 : 12 ] Why bother, Mark? And we remember, don't we, that there's two speakers playing a symphony. And the explanation comes to us in verses 27 to 29.

And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi and on the way he asked his disciples, who do people say I am? And they told him John the Baptist and others say Elijah and others, one of the prophets, do you see?

It's like men walking, looking like trees, isn't it? Verse 24, I see men but they look like trees walking. It's a little bit like Peter's perception previously.

Verse 29, and Jesus asked them, but who do you say I am? Peter answered him, it's a miracle, you are the Christ. Amazing, isn't it? So do you see the two stages in this part of Mark's gospel?

The question is Jesus' identity and it's like most people are seeing with blurred vision, yet Peter can now see clearly. It's a miracle, sight to the blind.

[ 10 : 15 ] And Mark has both speakers playing and we can hear the harmony as we look at the passage here. and he has us penciled in, doesn't he? His readers.

He has us penciled in, you and me. And the question is, can we see who Jesus is? So, that was how the two miracles work together and we think again now about those two groups, those on the outside and those on the inside.

Firstly, we'll think about those on the outside. Jesus asked, didn't he, who do people say I am? And the unwritten, the unwritten presupposition is, well, the name Jesus, it's run out of capacity long ago.

Everyone knows that. And so, in the first century world, they're frantically searching around for a name or a title with biblical capacity.

These categories they're, think about it, they're massively supernatural. Without wishing to be irreverent, friends, John the Baptist's head and his body had different postcodes, didn't they?

[ 11 : 35 ] So, these are massive categories when we think about it. And Peter's working it out, isn't he? He's thinking it all through.

The people around, they're clutching at straws. This is our explanation, they're saying. And then Peter says something like, can I phone a friend? And the friend is a speculator too.

He's Elijah, is the answer. Again, it's massively supernatural. These aren't normal categories, friends. Elijah had gone off the radar screen about 800 years previously.

You know, Malachi had promised his return, so they've been chatting in the pub, haven't they? How can we explain Jesus? How can we categorise him? What label can we put on him?

It's like everyone wants to pigeonhole him. It's like a form of control. One of the prophets, says Islam. But then, on the road to Caesarea Philippi, we move to our final point, which is those on the inside.

[ 12 : 40 ] And it's those who've realised that the explanations of this world are inadequate, that the human condition needs more than a prophet or a scholar or the wisdom of this age.

And Jesus looks, doesn't he, at his disciples, those on the inside. But what about you, he says, verse 29, who do you say I am?

And Peter's mind, it must have been like those spools on a one-armed bandit spinning around. He's thinking about all he's seen, all that he's been taught, all that he's encountered.

You know, let's just reorientate ourselves, friends, to the phenomenon of Jesus Christ in the first century. A musician plays an instrument.

Jesus has the creation itself responding, doesn't he, to his voice. The sick are healed, the dead are raised, climatic systems, fall into line with his commands.

[ 13 : 45 ] We think that's overwhelming proof of his identity. And yes, it is, but there's more to it. Just imagine what it was like first hand.

Just picture the scene in your mind's eye in chapter four, when Jesus is with his disciples on a boat. You know, these are professional fishermen, and they're petrified, looking at each other, gobsmacked, but it's not a storm that's frightening them, but the calm sea.

They say, who is this? Even the wind and waves obey him. It's eerie, eerie when the person that they know as their friend and teacher, that they eat with, that they travel with, that they sleep with, who wears the same sort of clothes, it's eerie when his words are different from their own.

You see, his words have creation itself responding. The creation, friends, think about it, of which they're part of, and also of which we're part of.

Jesus has total control, and that's what his disciples are feeling in their guts. Perhaps their intuition is telling them that the creator is with them.

[ 15 : 07 ] They ask, who is this? And now it's time. Jesus wants the verdict, doesn't he? Who do you say I am?

So it's not reflection this time, but profession. And Mark's brought us all together for this verdict.

Peter knows the Old Testament hope, doesn't he, of the Christ, the Messiah, that God would have a king who'd rule forever, 2 Samuel, chapter 7, and various other passages.

You are him, says Peter, doesn't he? You, Jesus, are bringing into the present God's future, and it's as if all the angels in the heavenly realms are rejoicing at his verdict.

And it's been like a romance for eight chapters, and Peter's worked it out here. And it's like a romance, friends, in our own lives, isn't it? Whatever stage we're at, all the time Jesus drawing us to himself, keeping us to himself, wooing us.

It's like he says, just come with me, step out of the rat race while we talk together. So here it is, Peter's verdict. And we finish now, friends, with what seems like an anticlimax.

[16:28] We expect Jesus, don't we, to send the disciples out into the world to tell everyone. But friends, think about this, his identity won't save anybody, will it?

And so verse 26, the blind man doesn't go to the waiting press, does he? You know, there's no champagne reception for him. Jesus doesn't want hundreds of people queuing up for healing. That's not why he came, verse 26. He sent him to his home, saying, do not even enter the village. And it's just the same with the disciples, verse 13. He strictly charged them to tell no one about him. We didn't expect that, did we? You see, Peter's perception of the Christ would be a Christ who has troops, chariots, horses, conquest, Christ.

Paul Barnett says, the mere mention of the word Messiah among the Jews at that time would have ignited a nationalistic bushfire. And so, think about this, Jesus would rather silence, he'd rather silence, wouldn't he, friends, than a message about him that's incomplete or corrupted.

[17:50] and you see, friends, verse 31 is not the sort of Christ that Peter had expected.

Silence, says Jesus, is a better message than one without the cross. And that applies to each one of us today. Jesus doesn't want us telling folk about him if we don't properly understand the cross or if we don't properly understand the human problem of sin which led to the cross.

Listen, he doesn't want ministry to downplay the cross. What he's saying is beware of who you listen to.

That's the message in this passage. The blind man, well, the blind man and Peter, they probably have to bite their tongues, don't they? At this point.

The blind man's church would have had experience as its highest value. And Peter's church, well, that would have had the ebb and flow of politics as its highest value.

[19:02] You know, it would have been sort of an institutional church. But neither of them, friends, could offer salvation, could they? So Jesus at this point says silence.

And so, on the road to Caesarea Philippi, Peter's worked out Jesus' identity, but it's radio silence. And we hold our breath, friends, until verse 31.

Shall we pray? Okay. a few moments just to think through and apply this material to our own situations.

Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for sending your Son into the world, and we thank you for his revelation to us. and we pray, Father, that we'd properly comprehend who he is, and also why he came.

And we pray, Father, that we'd be able to speak of your Son accurately, that we will glorify him as David was wishing us to pray earlier, that we would be able to present a fully orbbed gospel, one that penetrates and saves because it comes into this world like your Son.

[20:33] Indeed, through his Spirit, Father, it's exactly an encounter with your Son, Jesus Christ. So we pray that you guide us, each one of us, and help us in that, Father.

And we pray, Father, in all that we do, that you would indeed glorify yourself through our service of you and of your ends.

And so we pray, Father, that you would go with us now, whether we're going shopping or to a coffee with friends or we're going back to work. We pray that wherever we're going, you'd go with us and that you'd use us to radiate what it is to be yours.

And so may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of his spirit be with us now this day and forevermore.

Amen.