

Week 10: Missing the Point

Hook



Main Point: Everyone, even His disciples, misunderstood who Jesus really was at first.

What are some things that are obvious to you now but you missed when you were younger?

The *Titanic* has always been a point of historical interest but in the summer of 1997, the ship was at a fever pitch in culture. The film by the same name was released that year, and has earned \$2.264 billion worldwide and launched documentaries, books and merchandise.¹ The film caused many to wonder how the warning signs were missed and the tragic event that claimed some 1,500 lives took place.² People have tried over the years to piece together how the *Titanic* failed to take action and avoid the iceberg; it seems so obvious as to what the *Titanic should* have done. Contributing factors to the debacle include:

1. The lookouts in the *Titanic's* crow's nest did not have access to binoculars, relying instead on the naked eye to spot icebergs on the evening the ship sank.
2. The *Titanic* received at least six iceberg warnings from other ships.³
3. The ship's captain was overconfident; despite the warnings of massive icebergs in his path, the captain did not slow the ship, increase lookouts, or convene with other crew to evaluate their course of action.

Transition: In today's lesson, we will explore how some people, including the disciples, often missed what seems so obvious to us today – the person and teachings of Jesus.

RECAP: In our first lesson, we learned about the author, audience, genre and occasion of the Gospel of Mark. Gospels are not just stories, biographies or history books; they are proclamations of the Gospel, like sermons. Mark's focus on Jesus' action more than His teaching propels us to consider how we will act in response.

In lessons 2 through 4, we saw how every part of Jesus' ministry pointed to His kingship as the Messiah they had been waiting for, but in a different kind of kingdom than they expected – a spiritual kingdom that is upside down from the kingdoms of this world.

In lessons 5 through 7, we saw Jesus' behaving differently from the typical religious leaders of His day and flipping their social systems upside down. Some people reacted positively to Jesus and some reacted negatively, especially those who didn't want their world turned upside down because the status quo was working in their favor.

In lesson 8, Jesus performed three God-sized miracles that show us He was not only sent from God; He *is* God. In lesson 9, we saw people's reactions to Him, this time all negative – those who thought they knew Him already, those who rejected His disciples, and those who thought He was a threat to their power.

In this lesson, we'll see more of Jesus' miracles and teaching and how the people, even His disciples, so often misunderstood who He was and what He was trying to teach them.

Week 10: *Missing the Point*

Book

Main Point: Everyone, even His disciples, misunderstood who Jesus really was at first.

Mark 6:30–44, 52 [Read]

Talking Point 1: The disciples didn't get that Jesus was God, at least not yet.

Q: Why did Jesus have compassion on the crowds?

Q: How much food was leftover? What does this tell us about Jesus?

Q: How does Jesus' command, "You give them something to eat" (v. 37), challenge the disciples' faith and perspective on resources?

After the disciples returned from their mission, Jesus told them to go away to a desolate place and rest. Jesus often withdrew from the crowds to pray, rest, and recharge, and He encouraged His disciples to do the same. This is a great model for ministry. After busy seasons, we must take time to rest. But Jesus not only rested after a busy season, He took regular time out to pray, rest, and recharge. He modeled a consistent rhythm of work and rest.

But the crowds saw them leaving, ran after them on foot, and arrived ahead of them. Mark said Jesus was moved with compassion for the crowds because they were "like sheep without a shepherd." The phrase for compassion is a unique word in the New Testament, only used 12 times, almost always of Jesus' compassion for people. It literally means to be moved "to one's bowels," the deepest part of you, what the ancients considered the seat of love and pity. Over and over, we see Jesus' deep love for His people, just like God's love for them.

The phrase "like sheep without a shepherd" comes from Ezekiel, when God condemned the leaders of Israel for being "bad shepherds" to His people, using and abusing the flock for their own gain rather than caring for them as a shepherd should. Because they did not care for the flock, the flock became scattered and vulnerable to predators. So, God said He would come Himself to care for the sheep. He would search for the lost sheep, gather them, and bring them to green pastures (Ezekiel 34). This promise had both a near-future fulfillment, that God would bring His scattered people back from exile, and a far-future fulfillment in Christ. He is God come to earth, the Good Shepherd who would seek and save the lost (Luke 15; John 10). We see this in Jesus' compassion for the lost sheep of Israel.

Jesus began to teach them many things, and it grew late. The disciples told Him to send the crowds to nearby villages to find food. This was a huge crowd – 5,000 men, plus women and children. The nearby village's average population was 15,000.⁴ Such a large crowd swarming the marketplaces of the nearby villages would have been overwhelming. Jesus told the disciples to give them something. The disciples had just been on mission where they had fed people spiritually and performed miracles. He was telling them they already had what the people needed, but the disciples asked if they should really spend more than six months' salary to buy bread for this crowd. They just didn't get it.

Jesus took the five loaves and two fish they had, said a blessing, and divided the food. He "looked up to heaven," reminiscent of the manna coming down from heaven. All 5,000 men (plus women and children) ate until they were satisfied, and, still, 12 baskets remained – the number of both the 12 tribes of Israel and 12 disciples. As God supernaturally provided manna in the wilderness, Jesus provided food in the desolate place. Even abundantly more than they needed. This story reveals that Jesus is more than just a prophet, He is God Himself, the Good Shepherd who cares for His flock and provides for their every need.

Mark doesn't tell us how the disciples or the crowd reacted; he went straight to the next story. Immediately, Jesus sent the disciples to Bethsaida in the boat while He dismissed the crowd. But after the next miracle, Mark said that they didn't get the miracle of the loaves because their hearts were hardened. This seems like a strange thing to say about Jesus' disciples. That's what Scripture says about Pharaoh! Yet it's also what it says about Israel many times, especially in the wilderness, right after they had experienced God miraculously rescuing them from slavery! It seems crazy that even those closest to Jesus, who experienced His miracles directly, could have hardened hearts. The disciples were often confused, fearful and doubtful in the Gospels. It wasn't until the Holy Spirit was poured out on them at Pentecost that they finally understood and were filled with boldness to preach the Gospel despite persecution.

This can be personally convicting to those of us who are committed disciples of Jesus today. Even we can have hardened hearts at times. We worry and fear even though we know we should trust God. We doubt God will provide – though we've seen Him do it time and time again. We stubbornly hold onto habits we know aren't His best for us. We sometimes misunderstand what He is trying to teach us, as the disciples did. Simply because we're human. Though we have been made new creations in Christ, we live in a fallen world.

Although those who know Christ cannot harden our hearts in such a way as to lose our salvation, we can miss out on some of God's blessings of wisdom, peace and joy. Hard hearts can only be softened by the Holy Spirit. This effect is only brought about by intimate fellowship with the Spirit. Letting the Spirit guide us and teach us will grow His fruit in us. It requires a daily submitting of ourselves to His refining work in our hearts, praying for the Spirit to soften our stubborn hearts, help us understand His Word, and make us more like Him.

Q: How have you experienced fear, doubt and worry even though you know you should trust God? Why did you feel this way?

Q: How can you be more open to the leading of the Holy Spirit?

Mark 6:45–56 [Read]

Talking Point 2: The crowds didn't understand who Christ was, but they believed in His power.

Q: Why were the disciples terrified? Why were they utterly astounded?

Q: What does the people asking to touch the fringe of His garment tell us about His power?

Q: In what ways does Jesus' example of prayer invite us to grow in our own spiritual disciplines?

Jesus went up on the mountain to pray. Not just because it was a secluded place; throughout Scripture, mountains were meeting places with God. Again, Jesus modeled rest and retreat with God. When evening (sunset) came, the disciples were out at sea and Jesus was on land. The wind was against them; they were struggling. The Sea of Galilee has an unusual climate, and storms can arise quickly, ferociously and without warning. Just two chapters earlier, the disciples had been in another storm on the Sea of Galilee, but Jesus had been with them, asleep in the boat. That time, when they woke Him up, He rebuked the wind, and they were terrified, asking "Who is this, that even the wind and waves obey Him?" (Mark 4:41).

This time, Jesus wasn't with them; they thought He was miles away, praying on the mountain. So, when they saw Him walking on the water, it makes sense that they thought it was a ghost. They had started struggling with the wind at sunset (6:00–8:00 p.m.), and when He finally came to them, it was the fourth watch (3:00–6:00 a.m.). He let them struggle with the wind for a very long time before He came to them.

Sometimes God allows us to go through struggle, pain and suffering for a while before He comes to our aid because there's something to be learned in the struggle.

Again, Mark used the word "terrified," but this time they were terrified when they thought He was a ghost, not after He calmed the sea. Afterward, they were astounded; they didn't understand, but they weren't afraid. They were "terrified," but Jesus told them to "take heart" and "not be afraid" because "It is I." It's not a ghost; it's me. They should have been comforted by His presence, especially since they had seen Him calm the sea before. "It is I" is the Greek version of the phrase – "I AM" – God used when Moses asked His name at the burning bush. Jesus also "passed by" them, echoing the way God passed by Moses to show Him the backside of His glory. All of this points to the divinity of Christ. He is the great I AM, the One who created the sea and rules over the wind and waves.

The first time Jesus calmed the sea, the disciples were terrified. This time they were "utterly astounded." They didn't understand this or the miracle of the loaves. Both should have shown them His divinity, but their hearts were hardened. It seems strange that they were astounded. They had seen Him calm the sea before, not that long ago. It seems strange that they were confused. By now they should have known He was more than just a human king come to rescue them from Rome; He was God Himself come to earth. But this was all so much more than they had imagined. They simply didn't get it yet.

When they finally crossed over the sea to the other side and got out of the boat, the people there recognized Jesus, too. At this point, He had developed a reputation, especially for healing. These people ran all over the region to get the sick and bring them to Jesus. They asked only to touch the fringe of His garment to be made well. The fringe wasn't just a random part of His clothes. It was the prayer shawl that hung out from His cloak. It had 613 tassels for the 613 commandments of the law. It represented His prayer life, His intimate relationship with God. These people did not completely understand who Jesus was and what He ultimately came to do, but they had faith in His power. They believed so much that they knew they had only to touch the fringe of His garment to be healed. There may be those in our lives who are at this point in their faith journey, where they're just looking for what they can get from Jesus. We can meet them there and help them really know Him. Also, for those of us going through the storm currently, we can be comforted by the great "I AM" who promises to be present with us (Matthew 28:20). Our job is simply to advance toward Him in faith no matter the season or circumstance.

Q: In what ways do people in our culture misunderstand who Jesus is? How can we share with them the truth about who Jesus is?

Q: How can we more deeply know Christ ourselves?

Mark 7:1–22 [Read]

Talking Point 3: It's not external religious rituals that matter, but your heart.

Q: Why were the Pharisees and scribes criticizing Jesus' disciples?

Q: What did Jesus say they prioritized over really following God's law?

Q: How does the example of "corban" (vv. 9–13) reveal the danger of using religious practices to avoid true obedience to God?

The Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus and asked why His disciples didn't observe the handwashing traditions of the elders. Mark interrupted the story to explain that the Jews had traditions about washing hands as well as cups, pots and even dining couches. This reminds us that he was writing to a Gentile Christian audience, the church at Rome. The text is also careful to tell us that the disciples were breaking tradition, not the Mosaic law. Jesus never broke the Law, even in the smallest way.

Jesus' response to them was that they were holding to the tradition of men but not keeping the commands of God. He called them hypocrites, a word He often used to describe the Pharisees, scribes and religious leaders. It is the Greek word for stage actors, who wore masks in the Greek theater. Figuratively, it means one who isn't who they pretend to be. They're just playing a part. Jesus said Isaiah described them well when he said they honor God with their lips, but their heart is far from God. Their worship was in vain because they taught the traditions of men as if they were the doctrines of God.

He gave an example of one way they rejected a commandment of God to establish tradition – the "corban" tradition. *Corban* means "offering" or "gift," from the root "to draw near." All five primary offerings were called "corban," as the general word for offering (Leviticus 1–5). When each tribe gave items to be used for the tabernacle, such as oxen and carts, silver dishes, gold dishes, incense, etc., they were called "corban" (Numbers 7). When the Israelite army brought the spoils of war as an offering to the tabernacle, it was called "corban" (Numbers 31). Over time, any gift to the temple treasury was called "corban," and the temple treasury itself (the room where the contribution boxes were) was called "corban."

The Corban tradition said that once something was dedicated to the Lord, it was sacred and could not be used for any other purpose. Some Jews were dedicating money as corban that should have gone to care for their aging parents, which may have made them look good to the religious people but broke the commandment to honor their parents. This revealed a heart that was more concerned with looking good than loving people – a hypocrite. Paul spoke to this exact scenario when talking about widows, saying if a widow didn't have family, the church should care for her, but if she had family, they should provide her care. He even said anyone who does not provide for their own family (not just immediate family but any family member in need) "has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:1–8).

Jesus said, "Many such things you do." This was just one example of how they elevated human traditions over the Word of God. Then He explained it's not what goes into you that defiles you, but what comes out. It's not about the external rules; it's about the heart. He was quite graphic about it: It doesn't matter if impurities get in your mouth because you didn't wash your hands; they will just be eliminated. What matters is the impurity in your heart, which will come out in your actions. Those who have the heart of God will care for other people, especially the least of these, even when it's inconvenient. Those who follow all the "rules" without truly loving others are just playing at religion.

Q: How have you seen religious people prioritize following the "rules" over loving people the way Jesus did? What would you tell them about what true religion is?

Q: How can we pursue purifying the impurities in our hearts?

Week 10: Missing the Point

Took

Main Point: Everyone, even His disciples, misunderstood who Jesus really was at first.

More than 4 billion people use social media, where they're regularly exposed to AI-powered photo filters – technology that can subtly or drastically distort an image. Some filters make small changes – removing a blemish or brightening the lighting – while others can alter a person's appearance so completely that they become almost unrecognizable. *(Teacher: You may wish to show an extreme example on the screen.)*⁵

In a similar way, some people miss Jesus because they've been given a distorted picture of who He is. Maybe they grew up in a "Christian" home but never experienced the love of God. Others may have embraced a false view of Jesus because of deceptive teaching. Whatever the cause, their understanding has been filtered and altered until the true image of Christ is obscured.

Pray for those who have misunderstood Jesus – especially those who've been led astray by false teachers. Ask the Lord to reveal Himself clearly, and to bring genuine believers into their lives who can show them the real Jesus.

CHALLENGES

THINK: Reflect on ways people misunderstand Jesus today – who He is, why He came, and what He asks of us. Think about ways people misunderstand Christianity or see it as a religion or set of rules instead of a relationship. What are some ways you have misunderstood Jesus? What are some ways you have focused more on the rules than loving people well? As His people, how can we do a better job reflecting an accurate picture of who Jesus is? How can we show people what Christianity is really all about, both through our words and actions?

PRAY that the Holy Spirit will work in your life to teach you, guide you, and make you more like Jesus. Pray that God will reveal to you any ways your heart has been hardened and soften your heart.

ACT: Really knowing Jesus and keeping a soft heart requires us to walk in intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit, the One who guides us, teaches us, refines us, and grows His fruit in us. This week, choose one spiritual discipline you have not yet tried and focus on practicing it to grow in your communion with the Spirit.

¹ <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt0120338/>

² <https://www.britannica.com/question/How-many-people-died-when-the-Titanic-sank>

³ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/106HNdgRR6yXZqwRqjVHghm/10-mistakes-that-led-to-the-titanic-disaster>

⁴ Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, 6.420

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<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9577667/#:~:text=Social%20media%20is%20being%20used,up%2054.4%25%20of%20its%20clients.>