

# Community Group Materials

## 30 April/1 May

### Mark 8:22 – 9:1

#### **Tee**

What makes a church truly “Christian”: what are the absolute essential non-negotiable facts of faith?

#### **Task**

Spend time in pairs and find 1 verse/passage in the Bible that you believe best sums up the Christian faith.

#### **Target**

#### **Takeaway**

Jesus heals a blind man at Bethesda:

Faith as a Process: The gradual healing of the blind man illustrates the gradual progress of faith in the life of the disciples. Though they have begun their journey by choosing to follow Jesus, they have much to learn. There is a long and challenging road ahead, and it will be full of fits and starts. It is the same for us today. The kingdom of God was inaugurated through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, but it has yet to be consummated. Before that time, creation groans “as in the pains of childbirth,” and “we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom 8:22–23). Though in our flesh we still struggle and fall, the key is to get up, brush off, and keep moving forward in the power of the Spirit. Paul says it well: “No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us” (Phil 3:13–14 NLT).

Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ:

The question of Jesus’ identity and mission have been in the forefront of Mark’s gospel since the opening line: “The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah.” Up till now the answer to the question “Who is this?” has been implicitly answered through Jesus’ words and actions. He is the one who teaches with authority, casts out demons, heals the sick, raises the dead, calms the sea, walks on water, and feeds the multitudes. Most importantly, he is the one who announces and inaugurates the kingdom of God. Three themes related to Jesus’ identity run through this passage. The tendency to create Jesus in our own image is a danger still with us. Our perceptions of Jesus are inevitably shaped by our felt needs. The wealth and prosperity gospel claims that Jesus is there to make us personally happy and financially successful. There is a proclivity to ignore or pass over those passages that call for a renunciation of wealth or sacrifice for the kingdom. Those who despise others out of racial prejudice or nationalistic pride tend to pick up on biblical passages about the judgment of the wicked but ignore Jesus’ calls to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us. Like Peter, all of us

need to hear Jesus' rebuke of our self-promoting perceptions of the Messiah and submit ourselves to his authority and lordship.

Jesus foretells his death and resurrection:

The Cost of Discipleship: The paradox of salvation is that it costs us nothing, yet it costs us everything. Salvation comes through faith alone, apart from any works that we can do (Eph 2:8–9). Yet to depend on Christ for salvation means giving up your old life, with its pride, conceit, and ambition. Jesus says if you want to be his disciple, you must “deny yourself,” that is, renounce any claim to your own life and live wholly for God. This partnership in suffering and in glory is Jesus' point in the present passage. To gain true freedom and to share in Christ's glory we must first take up our cross and follow him (8:34). Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “The cross is laid on every Christian. The first Christ suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world.”<sup>21</sup> Freedom from the things of this world means freedom to become all that God wants us to be. The reward of glory for those who persevere is another theme throughout the biblical narrative. Paul speaks of the “crown of righteousness,” which the Lord will give not only to him but to all those who long for his appearing (2 Tim 4:8), and James of the “crown of life” that the Lord has promised to those who love him (Jas 1:12). For Peter it is the “crown of glory” that will never fade away (1 Pet 5:4). At the end of Revelation the glorified Christ makes the promise, “Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me” (Rev 22:12; cf. 2:10; 3:11). Just as the Son of Man will be vindicated at the right hand of the Father after suffering, so his followers who persevere will also be glorified.