

Pastor Kyle Mercer
Jesus & Disability

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Series: Unknown
Mark 7:24-37, 8:11-26

All right, Two Cities Church. That's the bull's-eye. That's the goal. That's what we're about. Welcome if you're new. That's Reality Church in Miami. If you're new or you've been coming around for a while, I just want you to know this: that's what we're about. We're about planting churches and making disciples. Period. Here's what's interesting: there's not one command in the Bible to plant churches. Did you know that? Not one command.

You're like, "That might be a problem because we're a church plant, and we've helped to plant 10 churches. Wait. Why is there not one command in the Bible to plant churches?" Well, there are a lot of commands in the Bible to make disciples, and we believe the most effective and efficient and holistic way to make a disciple is to plant a church. So, it's exciting.

In the last six years, we've genuinely been able to help plant 10 different churches from Brooklyn, New York, to Miami, Florida. So thank you, Two Cities Church, for your generosity. Give yourself a hand. Guys, it is so hard to plant a church. I don't want you to forget that we were a church plant. The hardest thing about planting a church is launching it, getting it out of the atmosphere.

It's like launching a rocket. They say that when you launch a rocket, it takes a swimming pool of fuel every second to get that rocket out of our atmosphere. Once it's out of our atmosphere, it runs on the same gas mileage as a Suburban. What's the lesson? It takes a lot of energy, it takes a lot of fuel to get something out of orbit. So, we're committed to planting churches.

Miami is a hard place. Every city has idols. The idol in Manhattan is money. The idol in DC is power. The idol in LA is fame. The idol in Miami is vanity. Have you ever gotten on a flight going to Miami? It's like, "Everybody is tan and in super shape and wearing too much makeup. What's going on here?" No joke. What's hard is the gospel

is about the internal, not the external. The gospel is about the heart, not the appearances. So, they are in the center of Miami doing a hard work.

Let me tell you. There are three things we're going to be about here as we plant churches and make disciples and send missionaries. You can memorize them. They all start with *S*. We'll make it easy. I want you to know, if you're a part of our church, you're a part of helping us do this.

The first thing we do when we send out a church plant, when we help to plant churches (and get ready, because we're going to keep doing this every year), is we *send people*. In fact, here's what I want you to ask. I know some of you bought your house, and it's your forever home, and you're never moving, and your parents live here. I get it.

I want you to think (I think this is a healthy thought), "Would God be calling me someday to leave this church to be a part of another church, to help plant a church?" When 30 people moved here with me and my family from the Raleigh-Durham area, about six or eight of them said to me... I couldn't believe this. I thought, "How do I create this type of church?"

Six or eight of them said to me, "Kyle, we always knew we were going to be part of a church plant." They said that. They said, "We're at The Summit. That's what they do. They plant churches. So we've been praying and talking about *who*. Who will we go with, when will we go, and where would we go that would be most efficient and effective for the gospel?" I thought, "That's amazing."

Here's the thing about people leaving your church: it's always the best people who go with the church plants. We've been trying to get rid of some of you for a while. You just stay. You won't go. The second thing is we are going to be a *shepherding church*. I'm on the phone every week, and so is Pastor Dave, and so are the rest of the staff. We're on the phone with one of the 10 pastors or one of their staff that we planted over the last six years.

Why is that? Because when a guy decides he's going to plant a church, Satan puts a bull's-eye on his back. Man! I'll just tell you, the things that have happened to these guys and to their families, whether it's temptation, whether it's suffering, whether it's opposition... We want to come alongside them and say, "We want to care for your soul as a pastor."

Thirdly, we are *supporting churches financially and prayerfully*. We're only six years old. We have given away hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of thousands of dollars to plant churches from Brooklyn to Miami. Again, because of your generosity, we were able to give Reality Church Miami 25 grand.

We want to increase our global footprint, so I want to tell you about two opportunities I want you to pray about. Maybe you go. Maybe you leave. Maybe you move. Whatever. We'll figure it out. But I want to tell you about two opportunities. First, Halifax, Nova Scotia. Some of you go, "Where is *that*?" That's America's hat, also known as *Canada*, if you didn't know that.

Here's what's amazing. There's Jeremy Dager. You're going to know him because he's going to be here preaching for me in a few weeks. So you're going to get to meet him, and you'd better just stay after and talk and put your hand on him and pray and ask and get to know, because we love him. Guess what. I called him this week because I was talking and he wanted to know how the series is going. He's going to jump into the series and preach. (I'm not going to tell you what week he's coming, so you have to come every week. There you go.)

Anyway, I'm talking to him, and he says, "Hey, man, pray for me. It has been unbelievably hard. We've been here for three months, and two of my wife's grandparents have died in the three months we've been here. She has had to fly back to the United States twice while we're trying to set up home here."

He said, "The first time we found out about the first grandparent was the day we pulled into the driveway of our new home. And my kids are struggling to adjust, because I have five kids up here." So we're shepherding them. They're going to be here. You're going to love Jeremy.

Then, secondly, I want to tell you about Thomas West and his family. They moved from Birmingham, Alabama, to London, England. Some of you go, "That's some culture shock." Oh yeah. Guys, 11 million people live in London, 2 percent Christian. Guess when he moved there. He didn't move there three months ago; he moved there three years ago, right before COVID. How would you like to go through COVID in London?

He said ministry there has been unbelievably hard and unbelievably expensive. They have a modest home they rent in London...\$5,500 a month. So, we're just saying, "We're going to come alongside you." We're sending our first team on a vision trip there in October, and we are going to help shepherd them. I spent some time with him in California when we were at the SBC together, just seeing how he's doing. Then we are going to support them as well. So, let's pray, and let's dive into Mark.

Lord, we lift up our church planters, our missionary partners. I think it's 3 John that says they went out for the sake of his name. I thank you for all of the gospel goodbyes that had to be said. I think of the Dager family. They invested a decade in Greensboro, helping Mercy Hill Church.

All five of their kids, at different levels (I think they have a 12-year-old daughter), had to say a gospel goodbye and have to reacclimate themselves to a whole new world. We just pray for them, Lord. We pray for fruitful and flourishing ministry. If anyone in this room knows anyone in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Lord, that we would begin to help them find people of peace.

Lord, we pray for London, England. We understand that Paul always went to the center of a city, and we understand that global cities are unique places from which the gospel can go anywhere and everywhere. So we pray for Thomas and his family as they are really feeling like, in this last year, they're actually now launching because COVID happened. They're in year three, but it feels like year one. We pray a blessing on them. In Christ's name, amen.

All right. We have a lot to cover. There's not a service after this one, so I hope you packed a snack. Mark, chapter 7. Start in verse 24. As you're turning there, raise your hand if you like to travel. You all like to travel...all of you. There are a few of you who are homebodies, but you all like to travel. We all love to travel. I don't know if Jesus loved to travel. He traveled a lot.

He traveled a lot for being a Galilean peasant. He traveled a ton for being a rabbi. He traveled a lot for being a Middle Eastern man. He traveled to Jerusalem. That was the epicenter of life and culture and thought and religion, so he traveled there. He traveled to Capernaum back and forth. That was kind of his headquarters. We think Peter maybe lived there. He may have stayed there a lot.

He traveled to Nazareth. I mean, he traveled to places no one even wanted to go. That's where he was from. He traveled to small villages. He took that boat everywhere. He was always getting in that boat with his disciples, and all we're told is a "desolate place." Well, today we're going to see something a little different.

This is the first time, the *only* time, not just in Mark's gospel but in any gospel, that Jesus leaves the state of Israel. That's it. We just get a little snapshot of it here in Mark 7 and Mark 8. Jesus heads to Tyre and Sidon. Look with me at verse 24. ***"And from there he arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And he entered a house and did not want anyone to know, yet he could not be hidden."***

Now listen. If Jesus wants to not be found out, he's not going to be found out. This is the way the author is writing to let us know Jesus is so prominent, he's so massive, he looms so large, he's so popular (this is the height of his popularity) that even when he leaves Jewish areas... Jewish areas should have been the only places that knew about him, but his fame had spread so much that he heads out to the Greek and Gentile and Roman areas and people recognize him.

01 HOW DO YOU APPROACH GOD?

You'll see one story here. We're going to meet this woman. Look at verse 25. "***But immediately...***" That's Mark's favorite word. It's used 42 times. "***But immediately a woman...***" We don't get her name. "***...whose little daughter had an unclean spirit...***" Okay. Not a good situation there. "***...heard of him and came and fell down at his feet.***" Then we get a little bit of information about her. "***Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth.***"

It's interesting. As you're reading Mark's gospel, if you've been with us for a while, you may think what I thought when I was planning to preach this. I started reading through it and looking at it, and I was like, "Wait a second. All of these stories kind of seem similar." It's like, have you heard a story about somebody who needs Jesus, and they walk up to him, they have a need, and then he heals it?

You may read this story at first and go, "What's the difference between *this* story and the woman who had a bleeding? What's the difference between *this* story and the leper? What's the difference between *this* story and the paralytic? Why are they all in here?" Well, they all teach us different lessons.

I think the main lesson today from this first story with this woman is...*How do we approach God?* I mean, there are different ways people think about approaching God. Let me give you the two extremes. Historically, approaching God is fit into one of two categories. The older view (some people still believe this), and the view in a lot of places in the world still today, is "God is impossible to know. He cannot be approached. Maybe he exists.

Okay, let's say he exists, because we don't believe that nobody times nothing equals everything. The fact that there's unity and diversity in the world and the fact that there's something other than nothing... Okay. God exists. Fair enough. But there are eight billion of us, and we're on this small planet in this small galaxy. I mean, come on! Do you think God cares about your schoolwork? Do you think the God of the universe would like to talk to you? Do you think you, little finite you, can know God?"

You can see there are some compelling arguments to that sometimes. You just heard that. You go, "Well, maybe I *am* small. Maybe I *can't* know God." We don't really believe that here in America. We tend to believe *this*: "I can know God. It's easy to know God. Jesus is my copilot." Or for a long time, a lot of celebrities started wearing "Jesus is my homeboy" apparel, whatever that means.

All spirituality kind of fits into this. "I feel close to God when I do yoga." Basically, the average American thinks God is a bigger, smarter version of them. "I mean, of course. He's God. He's bigger than me. He's not a ton smarter than me, but he's smarter than me, but the good thing is that God and I think the same about everything, basically." That's kind of the view of the average American.

Well, this woman shows us we have to respond to God in humility, we have to respond to God as a person (because God isn't a force; he has a face), and we have to respond to God by allowing him to speak to us even when it's hard to hear. I want to show you this. Look at what happens with the woman. You go, "What's going on with this woman?"

Verse 26 continued: "***And she begged him...***" Have you ever begged anyone? It's humiliating. Have you ever had to beg? Here it says (present continuous) she continued to beg him. She's desperate. You go, "Why?" Look. "***And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.***"

If you're a parent, you go, "I get it. I get it. I thought it was strange. I thought it was weird that she was yelling out for him. I thought it was a little weird that she got down on her knees. It may have been uncomfortable when we were told that she was begging, but I get it now. Her kid is in a major crisis."

We say this here all the time: you're only as happy as your least happy kid. If you ever meet somebody and their kid is in trouble, they are a different person. They are willing to do, they are willing to spend, they are willing to visit, they are willing to say a lot of different things. It reminds me of the movie *John Q*. If you've not seen *John Q*, I'm about to ruin it for you. You had 15 years. This is it.

John Q is this unbelievable movie. It's one of the only movies I can remember watching and sweating. (Too much information for some of you.) John Q's (Denzel Washington) son, a young boy, has a heart problem, and they try to go through the normal channels that you and I might go through. They meet with the doctors, and they find out, "We don't have insurance, and we don't have money," so they can't get on the donor list.

Denzel Washington has this phone call with his wife, and it's moving. She's like, "I need you to do something." He's this blue-collar dude. He's like, "I don't have money. I don't have [whatever]." You find out in the movie he holds up the entire hospital to get his son a heart transplant. Now, I'm not recommending that, but I understand.

You see it. There's part of you that goes, "I might do something like that." Denzel didn't care. He was like, "Maybe you haven't figured this out. My son is going to live. I don't care if I have to go to jail." There's a moment where he says, "Take my heart." I

mean, it's moving on multiple levels. That's what a parent does when they're desperate.

I heard a story of a dad. He got a terrible diagnosis about his son in the hospital. You know, you have one of those meetings, and the x-ray, and the surgery doesn't go the way it's supposed to. He says he gets this bad news, "Your son is not going to make it." He tells the story. He says, "I remember walking down the hallway, and I remember the elevator door opening up."

He said, "I crawled into the corner of the elevator, and I cried out for God to do something." He said, "I don't even remember if anybody else was in the elevator." That's what we're talking about here. There's just a desperation from this lady, which makes what Jesus says even more surprising. Look at what he says to her. ***"And he said to her, 'Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.'"*** Yikes!

By the way, this woman had a lot of things going against her. She was a woman, which would have been the wrong gender to be talking to a man and a rabbi. She was the wrong ethnicity (Syrophoenician). She was the wrong religion (Gentile). She was in the wrong spiritual condition (a demonic daughter). In Matthew's account, we're told the disciples said, "Jesus, get rid of her." She has other people trying to discourage her.

Then Jesus says to her... He uses this illustration of a family meal. He says at the family meal, the children eat, not the dogs. There are a couple of things he's teaching there. First is the priority of the Jews. Here's an interesting thing. Even the apostle Paul, who ends up being the apostle to the Gentiles... He was super Jewish, and God said, "I'm sending you to the Gentiles."

Do you know... Read it in Acts. Every time Paul lands in a city, he always goes to the synagogue before he goes to the marketplace. Every time. "I hope the Jews will believe. I'm going to go to the marketplace, but the gospel is to go to the Jew first and then to the Gentile."

Well, Jesus uses this illustration and says, "Hey, listen. The food is for the children. It's not for the dogs." We go, "Wow!" Part of us goes, "Is it an insult to be called a dog?" You're like, "I love my dog." We live in this weird culture where we're obsessed with our dogs. Back then, dogs were on the streets. Nowadays, in the average major city in America, especially Manhattan and San Francisco, there are more dogs than kids.

I've told you about DINKs (double income, no kids). DINKs are everywhere. Something almost as popular are DIDOs (double income, dog owners). They're all

over Ardmore. They're just walking their dogs. They're all over downtown. You have seen them.

Well, here's what he's saying. "It's not right to take the scraps from the table and give them to the dogs." This is hard because... Some people try to soften it. I always enjoy reading commentators and the different ways people try to soften this. "Well, he doesn't really use the word for *dog*. He uses the word *puppy*." No, it's supposed to be harsh, but I want you to see what happens here. Look at what happens in verse 28.

"But she answered him, 'Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.' And he said to her, 'For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter.' And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone." Actually, Matthew's account tells us on top of all that he also says, "What great faith you have." So that's great.

Here's what I want us to notice about this lady and the lesson I want us to learn. The first thing I want us to notice is she is the first person in the gospel of Mark to understand a parable. Isn't that interesting? Jesus tells parables to the crowd. They don't get it. Jesus tells parables to his disciples, and they later say, "Dude, what does that mean? Can you tell us what it means?"

Jesus tells parables to the Pharisees, and they don't get it. Jesus tells a parable to a hurting woman who has none of the right credentials, and she gets the parable. Not only is she the first to get the parable, but she's the first to respond correctly to a parable. I guess you have to get it to respond correctly.

Here's the third thing: she's the first person to not completely lose an argument with Jesus. I'm not saying she won the argument, but I'm saying every time Jesus has an argument with somebody...you know, Pharisee, disciple...they say something, they challenge him, he gives a scriptural insight or a principle, and there's silence, basically. This is the first time where she says something and he goes, "Oh, okay. Demon is gone. Faith is great."

Here's the principle: the woman receives the hard things Jesus has to say about her. You have to understand that Christianity begins... It's good news, bad news, good news. Good news: God created you. Bad news: you're sinful, broken, and headed to hell. Good news: but Christ died for you. The thing about Christianity is you have to be able to receive the hard things Jesus says about us.

You go, "Dog...that's kind of hard." Yeah, but what she says is, "Okay, fine. I'm not claiming that I'm a great person. I'm not claiming my rights." That's religion. "I'm not saying, 'Be good to me and heal my daughter and save me because I'm a good person.' In fact, I'm saying I know I'm not a good person. I know I have nothing to claim. I

know I'm a dog. I'm not claiming anything in myself. I'm asking you to be gracious to me in spite of all that."

Now, you have to understand if you read your Bible, you're going to be offended, if you're reading it correctly, about what Jesus says about you, but it's always truth and then grace. In other words, you read the Bible and it goes, "You're a sinner. You're a sinner by nature and by choice. You don't just do sinful things; you are sinful, and it has infected and affected every area of your life." You go, "Okay, that's hard to hear."

How about *this*? "You need to be rescued." That's kind of offensive. Not you need to be rehabilitated. Not you need to be slightly reformed. Not you need to be better educated. You need to be rescued. It's like, "Really? That's how bad my situation is?" Yeah. The other word is *saved*. The other word is *delivered*. I mean, Jesus says some really hard things. He says you are in the path of the wrath of God.

Jesus says if you do not repent and believe in him, you will die in your sins and go to hell. *Hell* is defined as eternal, irreversible, conscious torment. Some of you go, "Being called a dog ain't that bad." The principle is I let Jesus tell me who I am, even though it's hard to hear, and I respond to that in faith and ask for grace. "Okay, I'm a sinner. I need forgiven. Okay, I got myself in big trouble, and I can't get myself out. Will you save me? Okay, I don't want to go to hell. In fact, I know I can't save myself."

This is a whole other sermon, but the apostle Paul says in Romans 4 if you try to work for your salvation, it works against you. If you try to do something good for God to earn it, it's insulting. It's like if somebody owes you 10 million bucks, and they're like, "Here's 5 bucks." You're like, "Keep it." It's insulting.

02 JESUS & DISABILITY

So, the first thing we learn is a great story of a woman who needs grace and accepts the hard thing Jesus says about her. Look at verse 31. ***"Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis."*** We're getting far into Roman territory here.

"And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him. And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, 'Ephphatha,' that is, 'Be opened.'

And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more

zealously they proclaimed it. And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, 'He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.'"

So, here's what we're doing. Now we're in a section of Mark that doesn't show up in Matthew. Theologians call this the *great omission of Matthew*. It's two stories by Jesus that are only found in Mark. They're found in no other gospel. It's two healing accounts. It's the healing account that we just read of a man who is deaf.

Right after that account we're going to see some Pharisees and the disciples who are spiritually deaf. We talk about a physically deaf guy and we go to a spiritually deaf person. Then the final miracle that is only in Mark is him healing a blind person. What is *that* right after? It's right after we get the stories of, we could also say, the disciples being spiritually blind and spiritually unable to see.

So, we're going to look at the reality of physical blindness and spiritual blindness and physically hearing and spiritually hearing, but there's another topic we kind of have to camp out on and talk about as a church together. It's going to be a little interesting for about 10 or 15 minutes here.

It's a topic I've never addressed directly, but it shows up all over Scripture. This happens to me every once in a while. I'm like, "I need to talk about this, but we've never talked about this." It's disability. You read these passages, and what is Jesus constantly doing? I mean, he's doing a lot of exorcisms. He's dealing a lot with demons, but when he's not dealing with the demonic, he's...

I mean, I don't know. What would you call all of these healings? He's dealing with people who have disabilities. There's a blind guy. There's a deaf guy. There's a lame guy. How broad of a category do you want to make it? There's a leper. Disability is a broad category, and I'm going to try to talk about it carefully, pastorally, helpfully, biblically, because it's a topic we have to think about, but it's so personal.

Some of you might have a disability. Certainly, in a room this size, you do or you might know somebody who does. Disability is so hard for so many reasons. Part of it is how chronic and constant it is. Sometimes you're born with a disability, and then sometimes it's aging and accidents or sometimes it's illness and injury.

All of a sudden, you're like, "Something happened to me at 25 years old, and now my body or my brain doesn't function properly, and I'm looking at 50 more years of this." Disability fits theologically under the category of suffering. We've talked a lot about suffering. I've never really talked about disability, and we need to talk about it.

There are a couple of things to say. First, the first disability we're told about is a deaf person. You need to know this. My wife told me this. I didn't know this. Many or, you

might say, most of the deaf community today does not want their deafness to be known as a disability. They say, "We have our own language. We have our own community. We have our own schools." Fair enough.

I want you to understand that particularly back in this time, though, deafness was considered a severe disability because they lived in an oral culture, which you're very dependent on being able to hear. We live in a visual, media, print culture where the primary channel isn't the ear for everything, it's also the eye.

I want to talk to us a little bit about disability, and I want to do it from a couple of angles. First, let's just talk about what disability is. There are two elements and aspects to disability. The first element is the *functional* element. The second element is the *social* element of disability.

The functional element is (I'm trying to be careful how I talk about this) some part of a person isn't fully functioning properly, not as God has intended it, not as it works in the typical person. It could be a mental faculty. It could be a physical ability. It's usually some type of capacity or capability. So there's the functional element of it. It's a large category. We can't talk about every type of disability.

Then there is the social dimension of that disability, which is how people treat you because you have it. Part of the issue with a lot of us is we don't know what to do with a person who has disabilities. We're like, "I don't want to avoid her, but I don't want to give her too much attention. How do I even ask about this? I'm interested to know what happened, but how do I ask the mother?"

I'll tell you two things. First, I knew a guy, and his daughter was severely disabled. We had them over for lunch. This was years ago, not at this church. We were talking, and he was a very open guy, and he said, "Hey, the best thing to do if you see my daughter or someone like my daughter is not to say, 'What's wrong?' or 'What happened?'" That's what people say, normally. They're trying to be helpful, and they want to know. He said, "The best thing to say is, 'What's her story?'" I thought, "I'll put that in the back of my mind. That's really helpful."

The second thing was talking to a guy in our church. His son was born with a disability, and they found out while his wife was pregnant. He said, "As soon as we found out my son would be born with a disability, we tried..." Like we all would do. "Who do I tell? Okay. Tell Mom and Dad. Tell brothers and sisters. Tell close friends. As it gets closer, tell more people."

He says, "We're telling everybody, and as soon as we tell everybody, the first thing they all do is apologize." He said, "It just didn't hit me right. Everybody is telling me

they're sorry about my son." He said, "My son is being born with a bunch of 'Sorrays.'" So, we have to figure this out.

Now, what does the world say about disability? Go ahead. You want the cold, hard facts of atheistic Darwinian evolution? I'll tell you it's not very kind to the disabled or people with disabilities. Because here's what's going to happen. Anyone who has kids knows this happens. You're at a restaurant, you're at an amusement park, you're at a school function, you're downtown, and your son or daughter points.

You say, "Don't point!" They say, "That girl over there... Why is she in a wheelchair?" Or maybe they're more theological. "Mom, why did God make her that way?" You have to have an answer. Here's the Darwinian atheistic evolution answer: "Chance. Unlucky. Random. Unfortunate genetic mutation."

"What's the hope, Mom and Dad? What would be the hope for them?"

"Technology increasing. Surgeries. Science. Medicine."

"How about after death? Is there any hope?"

"No. They die and disappear."

So, the only hope for the disabled after death, from the atheistic Darwinian evolution perspective, is they die and disappear so they don't exist anymore, but at least they don't have that disability. Well, none of that is helpful. The disciples are confused about disability. This is why this is important for us to have this conversation. I think in the church we... The disciples show us the main way Christians can be confused.

In John 9 (you don't need to go there, but it's a great place to talk with your Community Group), the disciples see this blind guy. They do the right thing. They ask Jesus about it. They say, "Jesus, is this guy blind because of something he did or something his parents did?" Jesus says something that's so helpfully pastoral to people. He says, "Wrong. This guy is not blind because of something he did."

That's what happens when... If you ever get in an accident or ever have an illness or injury, you will search your conscience like crazy. "Did I do something?" The second thing is he says it's not the parents' fault. That's really helpful, because parents are so hard on themselves if anything happens to any of their kids.

I had a lady last night. Her daughter was born with a disability. She came up to me and gave me a hug and said, "Thank you for the John 9 reminder." She said, "I'm a Christian, but I still search my mind sometimes." Nine months is a long time to be pregnant. You make a lot of decisions in nine months. A lot of things can happen. You start thinking, "Did I do something wrong?"

Jesus says, "No, no, no." Then he says something really profound to us. It's hard for us to hear. He says, "This person has this disability so in some way God can be seen in their life." You go, "What?" It's something worth thinking about for 10 years. Okay, so, Jesus tells us there's purpose.

Here's the tension. As my friend says, we just went on a long walk for a short drink of water here. That was us going all over the place for me to bring us all back. I want you to see what Jesus does. It says that before Jesus heals the man, he sighs. Did you see that? We don't get a lot of Jesus sighing in the Scriptures. This is one of them. Why do you sigh? Because you're disappointed, because you're frustrated, because you're overwhelmed.

Here's what Jesus realizes and knows: he's dealing with the weight of living in a world the way it's not supposed to be. So, here's what we have to say from a Christian perspective about disability. First, we have to say that God created every person, no matter how abled or disabled, fully and completely in the image of God. I think that's a uniquely Christian perspective.

What you're seeing from guys like Peter Singer... Google him sometime. He's at Princeton. He's a thought leader and all this kind of stuff. He basically wants to redefine humanness through ability and autonomy, and if you lose autonomy (ability to take care of yourself) or certain abilities, he considers you less and less human. Well, that's not the Christian perspective.

The second thing we need to realize is that disability is part of the brokenness and fallenness of our world. We all, to some extent, bear the brokenness of living in a world the way it's not supposed to be. Some of that brokenness in some of our lives is more evident. Some of that brokenness shows up in a disability.

Now, the other tension is we're trying to say there's meaning and purpose and ultimately a reason for this. At the same time, we say we are looking forward to heaven when this goes away and we're fully restored. If you ever walk with a family, that's really, really hard to walk through.

I have a buddy. He's a pastor. Believe it or not, he's a pastor, a great speaker, speaks all over the United States, and he has Tourette's. Every once in a while, while he's speaking, his face will go in different directions, and every once in a while he'll get caught up on his words, and every once in a while a different word will come out. It's a little awkward at times (he would say this) to be a communicator and have Tourette's.

He says everywhere he goes and speaks, people come up to him afterward (this isn't a bad thing) and pray away his Tourette's. I said, "What do you do?" because he has

been dealing with this for decades. I said, "Does it ever offend you when they come up?" He says, "No. I want my Tourette's to go away." He said, "People have connected with me because of my weakness. It has probably made me more winsome. It has made me more dependent on God, and I want it to go away."

I have another friend. It's a horrible story. His father became a quadriplegic later in life. He and his dad are both Christians. He said, "My dad and I often talk. When my dad dies, he's going to heaven and the wheelchair is going to hell." That's the tension. The tension we live in, as a robust Christian view, is to say, "God, there is a reason, though we may not be able to fully see and articulate it." It says, "The works of God may be evident."

People think there's a good chance the apostle Paul had a disability. He calls it a *thorn in his flesh*. Most people think Paul had bad eyesight. That's why he says to the Galatians, "Look with what big letters I write." That's why he said to the Galatian church, "You would have given me your own eyes." That was not a common colloquial saying.

That's weird to say, which makes me think they tried to take care of him while he had an eye issue. Paul basically says, "I asked God to take this away, and he hasn't. He said, 'My grace is sufficient. My power will be made perfect in weakness.'" So, we want to say there's a reason now and there's full restoration coming. That's the Christian worldview.

Now look. We see a picture of the restoration here, if you look with me at verse 35. ***"And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly."*** Then look at verse 37. ***"And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, 'He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.'"***

What we're seeing here... These healings are snapshots and trailers of what all Christians are going to experience in heaven, which is the full restoration of all things, the full renewal of all things, the reconciliation of relationships. Tim Keller says in heaven all sad things will come untrue. It's this beautiful picture.

They say to Jesus, "He does all things well." That's easy to say when God is healing you. It's harder to say when you're going through suffering. It's really a statement of faith. I don't know if you've ever heard of James Montgomery Boice. He was so famous as a pastor. It's hard to explain. He pastored Tenth Presbyterian Church in downtown Philadelphia. He wrote books. He had a national ministry. He traveled the country.

One day, in his 60s, he gets this diagnosis of cancer, and from diagnosis to death was six weeks. His church prayed for him, like *you* guys would. They believed God for him,

and they were hoping for healing. About three or four weeks into it, when he was on his last leg and he was heading home, he told his church, "Guys, thank you. I'm going home, and it's okay. He does all things well. He's going to help me go through this well." Wow! That's a way to say it.

03 JESUS & THE PHARISEES (SIGNS & LEAVEN)

So, Jesus heals this person, and then he goes on. We're going to skip the feeding of the 4,000. It's very, very similar to the feeding of the 5,000. Let me just say this as an interesting note in Mark. People see the three meals as a way to think about the book of Mark. So, there's his ministry to the Jews and then the feeding of the 5,000, his ministry to the Greeks and Gentiles and then the feeding of the 4,000, and his specific ministry to the disciples and then the Lord's Supper. It's an interesting way to think through the book.

Watch what happens in verse 11. ***"The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him. And he sighed deeply..."*** So, this is even a deeper sigh at unbelief. ***"...in his spirit and said, 'Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation.' And he left them, got into the boat again, and went to the other side."***

It's interesting. If you're reading this and have been following along in the Mark series, you might say, "Come on, guys. What more signs do you need? I mean, you heard his teaching, and you were in the synagogue when he healed the guy with the withered hand. You were in the home when he healed the paralytic." I mean, we read the stories. The Pharisees were there. They saw the signs.

What we're seeing here is something I think the Pharisees teach us about ourselves. Here's what the Pharisees are saying: "I want you to prove yourself to me on my terms." I think that's what we do. God is like, "Okay, I gave you the creation of the world. That's a great sign that I exist. I gave you the canon of Scripture. I gave you the person of Christ. I gave you 2,000 years of church history."

Certain Americans look at that and go, "Okay. Yeah, I know you gave me your sinless life, your substitutionary death, and your victorious resurrection. I know of your teaching, and I know of your claims, and I know of 2,000 years of church history, but I also need a boyfriend. I'm not going to believe until I get that boyfriend. I'm not going to believe until Mom gets better. I'm not going to believe unless I get into this college. I'm not going to believe unless my marriage gets restored."

We want God to do something specific based on our command, and then we tell him that we'll believe. What you see here is this is the first time, commentators notice, Jesus gets angry with the Pharisees in such a way that he dismisses them. Normally, he's back and forth with them.

Normally, he's having conversations. Normally, he's sharing Scripture. Normally, he's answering questions. Right here he just leaves...three verses. You have to remember that God is infinite, but he's not infinitely patient. So, this is the time where Jesus transitions to spending less and less time with the religious leadership.

I'll summarize verses 14-20. He goes to the boat, and the disciples realize they don't have bread, but Jesus is warning them about the Pharisees. He says, "Watch out for the leaven of the Pharisees." When Jesus uses leaven, he's always using it negatively, because leaven is that which spreads secretly and silently until it infects and affects everything.

He's warning them. He's basically seeing the unbelief of the Pharisees, and he's warning his disciples not to have the same. Well, they don't get it. If you read the story, they say, "He's talking about bread because we forgot to bring bread." It's so silly that you're like, "It has to be true." They are spiritually... There's just the dullness of the disciples.

I want you to see how verse 21 ends. Look here. **"And [Jesus] said to them, 'Do you not yet understand?'"** See in this verse both a rebuke and an encouragement. The rebuke is, "Guys, don't you get it yet? I mean, you've been with me. You saw my teachings. You've seen my miracles. I fed 5,000, and then I fed 4,000. I saved you from the storm. Do you not yet understand?"

Then there's another way to read this and see the hope. "Do you not yet understand? You're going to. You're going to understand. There's going to be a moment where it's going to click. There's going to be a moment where your eyes are going to be opened and you're fully going to understand things, but it happens in stages." That's interesting, because we're about to get the only miracle in the whole Bible that happens in stages.

04 THE BLIND MAN BEING ABLE TO SEE SLOWLY

Final story. Verse 22: **"And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man..."** So, there was the first disability, the deaf man. Now we have the second disability, the blind man...pictures of spiritual deafness and spiritual blindness.

"...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 spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, 'Do you see anything?' And he looked up and said, 'I see people, 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 to his home, saying, 'Do not even enter the village.'"

This is the only miracle that happens in stages. Usually it's like someone touches Jesus and it's healed, and he touches someone and it's healed. Sometimes it's just someone visits and says, "My son is at home sick," and he says, "Great. He's healed," and he's healed.

Jesus does everything on purpose for a purpose, so it makes us think, "Why is this healing in two stages?" Is it that he does stage one, and it doesn't work, and Jesus goes, "Hold on. I've got to charge my battery. Just one second here"? No. I'm being silly because obviously not. So, there's obviously a lesson that a healing takes stages. I think the lesson is exactly that: the way God heals us is often in stages.

We live in verse 24 right now where we see, but we don't see fully. I think there's a lot of theological foundation for that. The apostle Paul, describing our life now, says, "Though now we see through a mirror dimly." I think this is also helpful for us. God sometimes heals us in stages.

We know, theologically, the first thing God heals when you come to Christ is your soul. You say, "Thank God, but I have a lot of relationships that aren't healed." Some of that reconciliation may not happen until heaven. I've told you before I always wonder what David and Uriah said to each other when they saw each other in heaven. That was a reconciliation that couldn't happen until afterward.

There's hope for the future and a reality that God heals us in stages. This is what Christians have called *sanctification*. Sanctification is becoming more and more like Christ. Sanctification is becoming the godliest version of you. Sanctification is becoming practically and progressively more holy, and it happens in stages.

Most interesting, as we close, I want you to see how he heals him. Remember the first time he heals the guy a chapter ago? He puts his fingers in his ears and spits and puts his finger on his tongue. We go, "That was a little much, but okay." Then we come to *this*, and if you read it carefully, it doesn't say he spit on his hand and gently wiped. It says he spit on his eyes.

It's interesting. I love reading commentators and how commentators try to describe this. They're like, "Well, there's no history. There are no other Scripture verses on

spitting, and in the context and the time, there doesn't seem to be anything they thought was special with saliva. We're not sure why he spit on his eyes."

Well, here's what I think it is. I think, if we're honest, the idea of spitting on somebody's eyes that were probably deformed or had a bunch of things wrong with them is gross. It's repulsive. It's disgusting. Here's what Jesus is teaching us: the way Jesus heals us often looks disgusting to us.

Can you think of another instance of that? How about the cross? When you think about the cross of Christ, if you want to see how God healed your soul and forgave your sins in the most disgusting, ugly, repulsive way you could imagine... If you ever think about the cross, it's gross, if you only see it with the human eye, not with the eyes of faith.

I mean, it is so unbelievably terrible that if we were to all somehow be able to teleport back 2,000 years ago and see any crucifixion, I don't know that any of us could handle it. We're so domesticated. We're so sanitized as a society. Just so you know (this never makes it into the movies for obvious reasons), all of the crucifixions were done naked. That was a shameful part of it. It was like, "Let's shame this person before they die."

All of the crucifixions were also done at eye level, because they wanted you to see the pain on that person's face so you wouldn't go against Rome, except if they crucified a woman. If they crucified a woman, which didn't happen that often, they would crucify her backward, because even the Romans said it's too painful to watch a woman suffer that much and see it on her face.

When you watch a crucifixion... I mean, I don't want to be too candid here, but it took hours and hours and hours, so that means there were feces everywhere. There was urine everywhere. There was sweat everywhere. There was blood everywhere. Everybody was dying by suffocation, so they were screaming and crying out.

You look at that, and if you just see with human eyes, you go, "That is the grossest thing I have ever seen. I can't look at it." If you're able to see it with the eyes of faith, you go, "Oh my goodness! This is what God has used to save me. Jesus was in my place for my sins. He was my substitute."

That's why we sing, basically, love songs about the cross. It's strange. I brought some non-Christians from Duke with me one time to church. I said, "What did you think of the sermon?" They went, "The sermon was okay. The songs were crazy. You're singing 'Nothing but the blood'? What does that mean?" You have to see it with eyes of faith.

What the cross did... The Bible says by his stripes we are healed. What we say to you today, no matter what you're going through, no matter what disability you might be dealing with, is there's a reason here and there's restoration coming. Let's pray.

Lord, we just thank you for these interactions. We are so desperate to see what it's like for people to interact with Jesus. Lord, we thank you for the faith of the Syrophenician woman. If there's anyone in here right now who just needs to beg you for something, Lord...they need to beg you to work in their kid's life, they need to beg you for their marriage, they need to beg you for a breakthrough with a sin struggle...I just pray they would beg you.

Lord, I pray that no one here, no one who comes to Two Cities, no one who can hear my voice right now would be spiritually blind and spiritually deaf. The point of this whole story is that that's actually the worst thing. The worst thing is not to not be able to hear sound but not to be able to hear Scripture.

The worst thing is not to not be able to see light but not to be able to see the light of the gospel, Lord. So we pray that you would use us and you would use our church to open up the eyes of the blind and the ears of the spiritually deaf. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.