

Main Idea: There are three characteristics that make Jesus unique, all of which are demonstrated in Mark 8:22-38.

- I. Power like none other (22-26)
    - A. He met a blind man (22).
    - B. He healed a blind man (23-25).
      1. The key to the miracle isn't the technique.
      2. The key is the authority of Jesus.
    - C. He sought to prevent publicity (26).
      1. This was because of the fickleness of the crowd.
      2. This was because of the cross.
  - II. A person like none other (27-30)
    - A. Some people say He is a great man (27-28).
    - B. Peter said He is the God-man (29).
    - C. Jesus gave an unusual order (30).
      1. It wasn't time to make it public.
      2. The time to make it public has come.
  - III. A plan like none other (31-38)
    - A. He lived to die (31-33).
      1. He predicted His suffering.
      2. He predicted His cross.
      3. He predicted His resurrection.
        - a. Peter opposed the plan.
        - b. Jesus exposed Peter's problem.  
Key: When you're not thinking God's thoughts, God's plan seems foolish.
    - B. He says we must die if we want to live (34-38).
- Make It Personal: Some questions to ponder...
1. Who do you say Jesus is?
  2. What do you think of His cross?

*Report on Nepal trip (November 2-19)*

The cross is coming. That's what we'll see today as we place ourselves in Mark 8.  
The cross is coming, certainly for Jesus, but also for us.

*Scripture Reading: Mark 7:14-23*

We address many subjects from this pulpit, for God's Word addresses everything we need to know about life and godliness. We address matters such as stewardship, family matters, and more. But there is one subject that exceeds all others in importance. Indeed this subject is the basis and goal of all the rest. It's *Jesus*.

*He began His ministry by being hungry, yet He is the Bread of Life.  
Jesus ended His earthly ministry by being thirsty, yet He is the Living Water.  
Jesus was weary, yet He is our rest.  
Jesus paid tribute, yet He is the King.  
Jesus was accused of having a demon, yet He cast out demons.  
Jesus wept, yet He wipes away our tears.  
Jesus was sold for thirty pieces of silver, yet He redeemed the world.  
Jesus was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, yet He is the Good Shepherd.  
Jesus died, yet by His death He destroyed the power of death.<sup>2</sup>*

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\*\*Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

<sup>1</sup> For a previous look at this passage, see the Mark series in 2004.

<sup>2</sup> [Gregory of Nazianzus, A.D. 381.](#)

Today we continue our journey through the gospel according to Mark. We've come to the middle of Mark's gospel, to a peak moment. It's time for a test.

*Who do you say Jesus is?* That's the question the Master posed in Mark 8. There is no subject more worthy of our attention than Jesus. That's no exaggeration. A skeptic might ask, "What makes Jesus so special?" We find the answer in today's text. There are three characteristics that make Jesus unique, each demonstrated in Mark 8:22-38.

### I. Power like none other (22-26)

Mark wrote this biography of Jesus about thirty years after the Lord returned to heaven. He penned this account of Jesus' life from the perspective of Peter, for the benefit of Gentile readers (probably those living in Rome). Those who received this treatise were suffering persecution—in a couple of years (A.D. 64) Nero would set Rome on fire and blame it on these Christians. Mark sought to encourage these suffering saints by reminding them of the suffering of their Savior. He also sought to clear up some of the false ideas that were being circulated about the person and work of the Messiah.

In the first six chapters Mark presents Jesus' ministry in Galilee. We see His amazing miracles and growing popularity. In the middle of chapter six, with opposition increasing, Jesus left Galilee and began to minister in outlying regions (in Gentile territory). The cross is getting closer.

Mark is the only gospel writer to record the next story, a story that shows that Jesus can do what no one else can do. There are three scenes...

**A. He met a blind man (22).** "They came to Bethsaida [a town located on the north end of the Sea of Galilee, where the Jordan River enters], and some people brought a blind man [Mark doesn't identify who they were, but Mark's emphasis that they brought him may be significant] and begged Jesus to touch him [those who brought the man believed Jesus could restore his eyes; they even had their ideas about *how* He should do it, by *touching* him]." So Jesus met a blind man.

**B. He healed a blind man (23-25).** "He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village." That's interesting. He led him outside the village. Why? Jesus doesn't explain His actions, not here anyway.

Keep in mind this certainly wasn't Jesus' first miracle. So far in Mark's gospel we've seen four nature miracles, three occasions of demons exorcised, and eleven healing accounts (including fever removed from Simon's mother-in-law, the cleansing of a leper, a shriveled hand restored, a paralytic's legs renewed, and Jairus's daughter raised from the dead).

It's significant that the Lord had already done miracles right here in Bethsaida. How did the people respond to Him? Not well. In fact, He pronounced a judgment on Bethsaida some time before this as recorded in Matthew 11:21:

"Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes." Yes, Bethsaida had seen Jesus work miracles, but had refused to believe in Him. Consequently, the Lord determined the city wouldn't see this miracle.

Once outside, Jesus took action, peculiar action to us. Verse 23—"When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, 'Do you see anything?'" You say, "Why did Jesus spit in the man's eyes?" I don't know. We saw the Lord do something similar with the deaf-mute in chapter seven when, to heal the man, He put His

fingers into his ears, then spit, touched his tongue, and said, “Ephphatha! Be opened!” Why did He spit? The ancient word believed there was healing power in spittle. We can perhaps understand this when we consider our own first instinct, after we cut or burn our finger, is to put it into our mouth to ease the pain.<sup>3</sup>

By using this action Jesus was perhaps helping the man to know His intent to heal him. You say, “So was there something magical about Jesus’ spittle?” No. In fact...

1. *The key to the miracle isn’t the technique.* Jesus didn’t heal people the same way...*intentionally*. He doesn’t want people thinking He’s merely a “miracle worker” who uses secret tactics to perform spectacular wonders. No way. In the gospel record Jesus healed at least seven blind men—and He used a variety of methods. Sometimes He touched, at other times He spoke, and at still other times He even spit! The key to His miracles isn’t the technique...

2. *The key is the authority of Jesus.* Why did Jesus do miracles anyway? You say, “It’s because He cared for hurting people.” Indeed He did, but there’s another, even greater reason. He did miracles to prove His messianic identity. The prophets had foretold what the Messiah would do. He will *reverse the curse* of sin in this world. Why is there sickness and blindness in the world anyway? It’s because of the curse in Genesis 3, for the consequence of man’s sin is *death*, physical and spiritual death. But God’s plan was to send His chosen one into the world to reverse that curse. Isaiah predicted this messianic activity in Isaiah 35:5, “Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped.” And that’s what Jesus did. Furthermore, that’s what Jesus *will do* when He returns the second time, *reverse the curse* in totality: no more tears, no more sickness, no more death; only life, everlasting life to those who know Him.

Now back to Jesus’ question, “Do you see anything?” The man’s answer is rather shocking. Verse 24—“He looked up and said, ‘I see people; they look like trees walking around.’” The man had felt trees before: slender, tall, upright. It’s his reference point for describing what the world now looked like to him. Apparently he could see shapes, but the details were still a blur.

Verse 25—“Once more Jesus put his hands on the man’s eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.”

So the healing took place in two stages. First, the man could see but it was *imperfect vision*. Then, after Jesus’ second touch, he saw clearly. He possessed *complete sight*.

Why didn’t Jesus heal the man all at once? He certainly could have as He did on other occasions. Perhaps it was due to a lack of faith in the man (Mark does mention that his friends “brought” him to Jesus—maybe he had doubts about the venture). Perhaps the Lord intended to illustrate what was doing with His disciples. They could *see* what others couldn’t see (as the very next scene demonstrates when Peter rightly confesses that He is the Christ). But they still didn’t see clearly (which explains why in the very next scene Peter rebukes Jesus). They see, but their sight is still blurred.

There may well be a picture here of how it works with us in spiritual vision. When it comes to granting spiritual understanding, the Lord uses a progression. We don’t “get it” all at once. When the Lord touches our eyes, we begin to “see” spiritual realities. We begin to behold things that we previously missed (when we were totally in the dark). But that doesn’t mean everything’s clear to us. Hardly. Even now we see truth, yes, but in many ways it’s still like seeing “trees walking around.”

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<sup>3</sup> Barclay, p. 190.

There's something else we mustn't miss, also illustrated in this miracle. The Lord doesn't stop working with His own until He has given them *complete sight*. Jesus didn't leave the man in the state of *imperfect vision*. He touched the man's eyes a second time and the world no longer looked "like trees walking around." By the time Jesus was done the man's physical eyes saw the world in perfect clarity.

So it is, beloved, for the Christian's spiritual eyesight. Paul put it this way in 1 Corinthians 13:12, "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; *then we shall see face to face*. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."

It's a fact. Right now we see in part. We know in part. Do you believe that? It's one thing to *say* we do, but another to live like it.

J. Vernon McGee writes, "There are some people who don't feel that way. They think they know all there is to know about everything. That is one of the curses of some of our good Bible-teaching churches. I was a pastor for a great many years, and I had members who never bothered to come to mid-week Bible study. Do you know why? They already knew more than I did. While that may have been true, the tragic thing was that they thought they knew more than they actually knew."<sup>4</sup>

Now we see in part, but be encouraged. The Lord isn't done with us yet. It won't be long until we shall see as we've never seen before! Not because we've figured it all out, no, no. Spiritual sight, like physical sight, is something God alone can grant. Only God can open blind eyes, just like He did the day He saved us, and just like He will once and for all the day He takes us home.

In scene 3...

**C. He sought to prevent publicity (26).** "Jesus sent him home, saying, 'Don't go into the village.'" Apparently the man wasn't from Bethsaida for Jesus sent him *home* and told him to stay away from that village. Why? For starters it's because Christianity starts at home. The first place to let people see the difference Jesus makes in your life is *at home*. Jesus sent him home.

But why the command to avoid Bethsaida? I see two reasons.

1. *This was because of the fickleness of the crowd.* There were plenty of people then, as there are today, who get excited about Jesus' miracles, but it's a shallow excitement. To be saved you must admit your need, your lostness. Fickle, self-absorbed people don't do that. They may try to *applaud Jesus*, but they won't receive Him as Savior and Lord. There's a second reason Jesus sought to prevent publicity.

2. *This was because of the cross.* The cross was getting closer and Jesus would allow nothing—not fickle crowds or even fickle disciples (as we'll see in a few verses)—to deter Him. He always lived with the cross in view.

What makes Jesus so special? Characteristic #1, He has power like none other.

## II. A person like none other (27-30)

It's less than a year now until the cross. For the disciples it's test time. The test consisted of one question. It's the most important question ever asked.

Verse 27—"Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi [that's twenty-five miles north of Bethsaida, located at the foot of Mount Hermon]. On the way [Jesus did a lot of teaching while walking with His followers; on this particular trip He raised a vital question; He didn't ask it to get information; He asked it to teach

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<sup>4</sup> J. Vernon McGee, p. 101.

them. Good teachers do that, you know. They teach well because they ask the right questions; here's the question...] he asked them, 'Who do people say I am?'"

Who is Jesus? By this time Jesus has been on earth for some thirty-two years. He's been ministering publicly for over two years. He's taught, healed, and even walked on water. But who is He?

It's *the question*, my friend. How you answer that question will determine whether you experience abundant life here and eternal life on the other side of the grave. *Who is Jesus?*

**A. Some people say He is a great man (27-28).** Mark records the disciples' response in verse 28, "They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.'"

The first thing that strikes me is that popular opinion of Jesus wasn't bad. The common people weren't saying, as had the Pharisees and scribes, that Jesus was a man possessed by Beelzebub (3:22). No, as they chatted about Jesus over coffee they expressed good commendations. "He's a great man," they said, "a prophet indeed."

What do John, Elijah, and the prophets have in common? For one, they were men who spoke for God. They were preachers, reformers who called sinners back to God. In addition, they were great men. God used them in tremendous ways to help His people. But in the end the fact remains, although good men, *they were men, mere men.*

Elbert Hubbard defined public opinion as "the judgment of the incapable many, opposed to that of the discerning few."<sup>5</sup> Public opinion, then and now, says that Jesus is a great man.

"'But what about you?' he asked [verse 29]. 'Who do you say I am?' Peter answered, 'You are the Christ.'" Notice the difference. People were saying He is a great man, but...

**B. Peter said He is the God-man (29).** "Jesus" is His name. "Christ" is a title, one that means, "the anointed one." In the Old Testament it refers to anyone anointed with the holy oil: prophets, priests, and kings, men anointed by God for special service. Toward the end of the Old Testament period, however, the term took on a special meaning (anointed with a capital "A"), such as in Daniel 9:25, "Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.'" The One who would restore David's kingdom and get rid of God's enemies would be *The Anointed One*, (in Hebrew) the Messiah, (in Greek) the Christ.

"That's who You are," Peter said to Jesus. "You are the Christ."

In his account Matthew records that Jesus commended Peter (Matt 16:17), "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven." But Mark omits this, simply stating that...

**C. Jesus gave an unusual order (30).** "Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him." Why the privacy? For one simple reason...

*1. It wasn't time to make it public.* Although Peter used the right word, "Christ," he clung to a very deficient understanding of that word, and Jesus knew it. When Peter said "Christ," he thought one thing, something very different than Jesus had in mind.

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<sup>5</sup> In Wiersbe, p. 139.

The fact is, Peter and the disciples had much to learn about the true meaning of Jesus' Messiahship. They weren't ready to make the news public, a fact they painfully discovered in the very next scene.

No, it wasn't time yet to tell the world about Christ. His primary reason for coming was still in the future. He'd come to die. Until He'd fulfilled that purpose it wasn't time to make it public. But know this...

2. *The time to make it public has come.* There's a sad irony here. So many times when Jesus healed people He told them to *keep quiet*, but so often what did they do? They told the world about Jesus! And what mission did Jesus give us? "You shall be my *witnesses*," He said. In other words, "Go, tell the world about Me!" But answer this. Who have you told recently? Beloved, the time to make it public has come!

Jesus has power like none other. Jesus is a person like none other.

### III. A plan like none other (31-38)

As we look at the following verses, keep in mind the story of the blind man Jesus just healed. The juxtaposition of these two events isn't coincidental.

Note the first words of verse 31, "He *then* began to teach." When? Right after Peter answered the question correctly, "You are the Christ." *Then* He began teach. In fact, that word "*then*" launches the final phase of Jesus' training ministry. And what was it He began to teach His disciples? About His reason for coming to earth, about His plan. Simply put, there were two elements to His plan, one involving Him, the other involving us.

**A. He lived to die (31-33).** "He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again."

Jesus always lived with the cross in mind, but until now He spoke about it in veiled language. No longer. Here's the first of three straightforward predictions of His death (the second comes in 9:31, and the third in 10:33-34). He didn't want anyone to think the death He would die was an accident, a tragic quirk of fate. No way. It was the very reason He came.

Jesus referred to Himself in the third person, using the Messianic title, "Son of Man."<sup>6</sup> He announced that He would suffer. He announced that He would be rejected by those who should have known better (the very teachers of the Old Testament law). He announced that He would be killed. What's more, He announced that He would rise from the dead after three days. Don't miss those three, clear-cut predictions.

1. *He predicted His suffering.*
2. *He predicted His cross.*
3. *He predicted His resurrection.*

That was His plan, the very plan His Father had designed and given to Him. He later put it this way in Mark 10:45, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." He lived to die, for it would be by means of His death that salvation would come to His people.

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<sup>6</sup> "There are two hundred and fifty-six names given in the Bible for the Lord Jesus Christ, and I suppose this was because He was infinitely beyond all that any one name could express." [Billy Sunday, in a sermon, "Wonderful,"](#) quoted in [The Real Billy Sunday](#).

Not everyone appreciates God's plan. Quite frankly, it makes no sense to the finite minds of sinful men that the Christ would die. It's not surprising, then, that in the very next verse...

a. Peter opposed the plan. Verse 32—"He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke [the word used elsewhere, *epitimao*, for the silencing of the demons] him." Can't you hear Peter? "Um, Jesus, didn't You hear what I just said? You are the Christ. You're the One who is going to set up the kingdom. Stop talking in negative terms. You're going to reign, not suffer and die."

It made no sense to Peter that the Messiah would suffer and die. It's like a coach saying he's going to win the Super Bowl by losing his next game. You don't win by losing. You don't establish a kingdom by dying.

Peter didn't understand the relationship between suffering and glory. Later he would understand that relationship and teach about in his first epistle (1 Peter 1:6-8; 4:13-5:10). But that would be later. In the here and now...

b. Jesus exposed Peter's problem. He did so publicly, too. Verse 33—"But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter [He made eye contact with the other eleven, knowing that they, too, held to Peter's faulty view of Messiahship]. 'Get behind me, Satan!' he said."

Whoa! "Get behind me, *Satan!*" Stunning words both to say and to hear. And remember that Jesus spoke those words, not to cunning Herod, nor to the wicked high priest Caiaphas, but to one of his dearest followers.

Why did the Lord utter such a charge? Had Peter committed a terrible sin? Not that he knew. He stood up for his Master. He tried to defend and protect his Lord. What was his problem? Jesus told him at the end of verse 33—"You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

There was Peter's problem. Though he didn't realize it he was tempting Jesus just like the devil had done in the wilderness, offering a kingdom without the cross. "All this I will give you," Satan said in Matthew 4:9, "if you will bow down and worship me." To which Jesus said, "Away from me, Satan! (Matt 4:10)." Yes, Jesus recognized the origin of Peter's rebuke.

How shocking that, as J. D. Jones observes, "one of Christ's fiercest temptations came from one of His nearest friends." But we shouldn't be shocked. After all, Satan is an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14).

It's the way the devil works, brothers and sisters. Cole is right when he says, "Satan's suggestion is not blasphemous or obviously evil: it is smooth, attractive and 'natural,' appealing to all 'natural' human instincts. That is why it is so dangerous."<sup>7</sup>

John Bunyan put it this way, "Verily, there is a way to hell from the very gate of heaven."<sup>8</sup>

Ponder this carefully. The evil one is most dangerous when he works through the lips of a friend. Listen to Jones again: "Peter was a stumbling block in his Master's way. He made it hard for Jesus to do the will of God. And still many a friend does the same unholy office for another. When we bid our friends think more of comfort than of duty;

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<sup>7</sup> Cole, p. 206.

<sup>8</sup> In Jones, p. 274.

when we bid them consider their own interests rather than God's call, we are committing Peter's folly and sin over again."<sup>9</sup>

There's a vital lesson to be learned from this...

**Key:** When you're not thinking God's thoughts, God's plan seems foolish.

Robert Morrison's friends tried everything they could to shake his resolve to go to China as a missionary. Any time we try to "water down" God's call, when we seek to encourage another to take the course of least resistance as opposed to walking the path God intends, we are acting as did Peter, as a spokesman for Satan.

I know of parents who've done this with their children, by encouraging them to pursue careers based on salary levels rather than kingdom values. A husband does it when he says to his wife, "We don't need to go to church this week. God knows we need time for ourselves."

Hear Jesus again, "Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

As Jesus walked through life He always kept His plan in mind. He lived with the cross in view.

"Didn't you earlier say there are two elements to His plan?" Yes, I did. *He lived to die.* That the first element. Here's the second.

**B. He says we must die if we want to live (34-38).** The very next thing Jesus did, after talking about His cross, was to tell His disciples about *their cross*.

Verses 34-38: "Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.'"

You see, living with the cross in view wasn't just something for Jesus. It's for us, too. He lived to die. We must die if we want to live. What does the latter mean in practical terms? Plenty, as we'll see next time. For now...

Make It Personal: Some questions to ponder...

1. *Who do you say Jesus is?* Can you say, as did Peter, "He is the Christ"? Do you believe He is God's Anointed One, the God-man, the One God sent to rescue sinners? Is He your Messiah?

2. *What do you think of His cross?* It's possible to call Him "Christ," but have a deficient view of Him, as did Peter. The question is, what do you think of *the cross*? We live in an age full of people who have redefined the cross. A. W. Tozer observed, "The old cross slew men; the new cross entertains them. The old cross condemned; the new cross amuses. The old cross destroyed confidence in the flesh; the new cross encourages it."

What do you think of the cross? To be saved you must believe in Christ *and* His cross. You must experience what John Newton did over two hundred years ago:

*In evil long I took delight,  
Unawed by shame or fear,*

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<sup>9</sup> Jones, p. 275.



*Till a new object struck my sight,  
 And stopp'd my wild career:  
 I saw One hanging on a Tree  
 In agonies and blood,  
 Who fix'd His languid eyes on me.  
 As near His Cross I stood.  
 Sure never till my latest breath,  
 Can I forget that look:  
 It seem'd to charge me with His death,  
 Though not a word He spoke:  
 My conscience felt and own'd the guilt,  
 And plunged me in despair:  
 I saw my sins His Blood had spilt,  
 And help'd to nail Him there.  
 Alas! I knew not what I did!  
 But now my tears are vain:  
 Where shall my trembling soul be hid?  
 For I the Lord have slain!  
 A second look He gave, which said,  
 "I freely all forgive;  
 This blood is for thy ransom paid;  
 I die that thou may'st live."  
 Thus, while His death my sin displays  
 In all its blackest hue,  
 Such is the mystery of grace,  
 It seals my pardon too.  
 With pleasing grief, and mournful joy,  
 My spirit now is fill'd,  
 That I should such a life destroy,  
 Yet live by Him I kill'd!<sup>10</sup>*

**Closing Song:** #183 “*Beneath the Cross of Jesus*” (all three verses)

Community Group Discussion:

1. In this morning’s message from Mark 8:22-38, we joined the Lord Jesus on His journey to the cross. Take time to re-read this portion of God’s Word. How does this passage affect you?
2. In verses 22-26, what happened during Jesus’ interaction with the blind man? What’s the significance of what Jesus told the man after He healed him?
3. In verses 27-30, what question does Jesus ask His disciples, and how do they answer Him? What strict charge does He give them, and for what reason?
4. In verses 31-38 we see that the cross produces controversy. What kind of controversy? How does Jesus want us to think about His cross, and our own?
5. For our final song we sang a hymn by Elizabeth Clephane, “*Beneath the Cross of Jesus*,” which says in verse 3, “I take, O cross, thy shadow for my abiding place.” What does it mean to abide in the shadow of the cross? Why is it important that we do so, and in practical terms, how do we do it?

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<sup>10</sup> John Newton, 1725-1807.