

An Inspiring Tale About the Public Reading of Scripture and its Effects

By Steve Burchett



Jackson was a newly married young man, converted as a teen and eagerly participating in his local church ever since. One Saturday evening as he and his wife were finishing up a documentary, he got a call from one of his pastors. He asked if Jackson would read Mark 8 for the “public reading of Scripture” portion of their meeting the next day. Nervously, he agreed.

Once the call was over, Jackson asked his wife,

Alyssa, “Honey, can we pray about this? I’ve been asked to read in Bible studies, but never at the main meeting.” They proceeded to pray together, asking God to calm his nerves and to make his reading clear and effective. Alyssa even prayed something that Jackson thought was a little audacious: “Lord, make this the most gripping, life changing Scripture reading this church has ever experienced!”

Jackson then grabbed his Bible and went to the basement and read through Mark 8 quietly, and then out loud. He struggled to say “Dalmanutha” correctly, so he listened to it repeatedly on a video online. He then read the chapter out loud again, prayed, and went to bed.

The next morning, Alyssa asked Jackson if he wanted to practice reading Mark 8 to her, which he did. About halfway through, she interrupted him. “You’re reading really fast!” He was a little frustrated at first, but knew she was right and took her advice.

In a blink of an eye, Jackson was standing in front of the church. He forgot to put a place in Mark 8 (rookie mistake), so he fumbled around a few seconds (felt like five minutes) before announcing the chapter, took a deep breath that sounded funny through the sound system (a few children chuckled), and rapidly began, “In-those-days-when-a-great-crowd-gathered...” He could hear his wife’s voice internally, “Slow down, Sweetie!” He calmed his pace and kept reading. He was doing so well, but then mispronounced “Dalmanutha.” He pressed on.

Nearing the end of Mark 8, Jackson came to Jesus’ words, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (v. 34). As he read, he sensed complete stillness in the room. Tears came to his eyes as he continued, “For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it” (v. 35). He thought he heard some snuffles. Maybe Alyssa’s bold prayer was being answered.

Once he finished and sat down, Jackson heard little of what came next because he kept reviewing his reading, and rebuking himself: “How could you mess up Dalman . . . Dalmu . . . Dalmanutha? Why didn’t I have the passage ready to read? Why am I such an idiot!”

You might assume that what happened next was a number of people came up to Jackson after the meeting and talked about how “powerful” and “helpful” his Scripture reading was. But, in this fictional story, that’s not what happened. Of course, the pastor who asked him to read told him he did a solid job. Also, a sweet older lady named Margie gushed over him, but she does that for anyone who does anything in the meeting.

So what happened? As soon as they arrived home, Alyssa hugged Jackson tightly and said, “Thank you, honey, for serving us so faithfully this morning and honoring Christ so well. You made me want to read my Bible more.” That’s all that happened . . . as far as Jackson knew.

But across town, the Reinhold family was hosting the Springers for lunch. While eating, Mr. Reinhold commented, “When Jackson was reading Mark 8 this morning, I heard Jesus say to ‘beware of the leaven of the Pharisees,’ and I thought, ‘What exactly is he talking about there?’ What do you all think?” The next 30 minutes were full of lively, fruitful interaction about Mark 8.

On the college campus close to the church building, Crystal was back in her dorm room. She could not stop thinking about Christ’s words at the end of Mark 8, “For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with holy angels” (v. 38). As Jackson read those words that morning, it was as if Jesus was there, speaking right at her. She had professed faith in Christ since she was 9, but never really stood for him. Christ’s words convicted her deeply. A year later, standing in a local lake to be baptized, she told the church that the day she truly began following Christ was the Sunday when Mark 8 was read by Jackson.

And what about the children who chuckled at the “breathy” Jackson that morning? Nothing noticeable happened in their lives that Sunday, or the next, or the next. But they all would conclude later in life, “We grew up in a church that took the Bible seriously.” Some were eventually converted, but if you were to ask them, none remember Jackson’s reading of Mark 8. However, if you could talk to the Lord about it, he would say, “I was there that day. Jackson was reading, but it was my word that those boys and girls heard. I made sure of that.”

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