

SEEING JESUS CLEARLY
Mark 8:22-38

Well I don't know if you've ever had the privilege of losing your vision of any degree and the whole process of having to get glasses, but it's quite the experience because we rely on our eyes so much. I'll tell you personally, as a kid, I think I had good eyesight but as I got into my 20's it started going downhill. And the decline was so gradual that I didn't realize it was happening until I went on an elk hunting trip in Colorado. I was on a trip with an older gentleman discipling me at the time and as we're driving down the interstate he told me to watch for certain exit signs since I, being the young man I was, probably had better eyesight and he's trying to pay attention to the traffic on the interstate. And I was trying hard but he's pointing out the signs before I am. And he's pry thinking "Why aren't you paying attention?" while I'm thinking, "You can read that?"

And so we started pointing out a few signs ahead that neither one of us could read because they're so far out and we would read it as soon as it was visible to each one of us and sure enough, he says, "You're blind as a bat!" – not totally but I did notice I had somewhat of a vision problem. It was a great day the day I got glasses because I could see more. I could see the geese flying in the distance. and the trees had more detail. Those are the first thing I remember.

And I've called today's sermon "Seeing Jesus Clearly" because even though we are half-way through this gospel and the disciples have been with Jesus for a while now, they aren't exactly seeing Jesus with 20/20 vision yet. Their perception of who He is and what He came to do is still a little blurry. And Jesus demonstrates it through this unforgettable and unique healing of the blind man in stages. What we're looking at today is definitely one of the most misunderstood miracles in the Bible because it's been taken out of context. So I am excited to teach on this. It's a real "Eye-opener"!

Let's read Mark 8:22 through the rest of the chapter.

"And they came to Bethsaida. And they brought a blind man to Jesus and implored Him to touch him. Taking the blind man by the hand, He brought him out of the village; and after spitting on his eyes and laying His hands on him, He asked them, "Do you see anything?" And he looked up and said, "I see men, for I see them like trees, walking around." Then again He laid His hands on his eyes and he looked intently and was restored, and began to see everything clearly. And He sent him to his home, saying, "Do not even enter the village."

Jesus went out, along with His disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way He questioned His disciples, saying to them, "Who do people say that I am?" They told Him, saying, "John the Baptist; and others say Elijah; but others, one of the prophets. And He continued by questioning them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ." And He warned them to tell no one about Him.

And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And He was stating the matter plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”¹

Alright, so last week we started out our time in the Gentile area of Decapolis where Jesus & the disciples fed the 4,000 plus crowd. And this was the second time that Jesus and the disciples fed a multitude of people. They learned that not only would they be feeding Jews but soon they would be feeding or nourishing Gentiles as well. It was all emblematic of the whole gospel movement coming. With the rejection from the Jews comes a turning to the Gentiles and a whole New Covenant shift being prepared in their hearts and a training for the Great Commission.

If you want to understand today’s passage the most clearly, you have to keep that in mind. **Context is king.** And this context, with where Jesus is at in His ministry right now, is **He is training the disciples.**

I. JESUS HEALS THE BLIND MAN IN STAGES (VV. 22-26)

This miracle of the healing of the blind man, won’t be understood in all of its profound truth without the context. This is a very misunderstood miracle. It is a unique miracle that Jesus does and only Mark mentions it. But it’s also in a unique spot because we’re half-way through the gospel and decisions are being made for Christ or against Christ. **From this point on, the cross comes into view.** It’s the hinge miracle of the gospel.

❖ This miracle is the hinge, or turning point, of the gospel.

Remember from last week, it became clear on their way up to Bethsaida that the disciples still hadn’t picked up what Jesus was teaching them through the multitude miracles. He said to watch out for the leaven of the Pharisees (false teaching & hypocrisy) but they start talking about how they only brought one loaf of bread. I mean, after feeding the 5,000+ crowd and 4000+ plus crowd, they had no reason to be even remotely concerned about how much bread they had. Jesus said to them, “Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? **Do not yet see or understand?** Do you have a hardened heart? **Having eyes, do you not see?** Jesus is basically saying, “There is something you should be seeing that you’re not seeing.”

That’s what today is all about. After having been with Jesus for so long and witnessing first-hand all that He’s done and taught, do they really understand who He is and what He came to do? Jesus knows they’re not and that’s why **He decides to heal a man in stages to teach them a spiritual lesson** about where they’re at spiritually and help them understand His will. It’s good to know that **Jesus wants to grow us and not just leave us in our spiritual blindness. But the key for us is that we have to meet with Him and spend time with Him in our devotional lives and church.**

When they get to Bethsaida, some people bring this blind man to Jesus and are begging them to heal his eyesight. And it says, **Jesus takes the blind man by the hand and brings him out of the village.** The main reason for this again, as we’ve seen is that the miracles by this point were becoming a hindrance to effective ministry. Most people, and Bethsaida in particular were seeking short-term solutions to their sickness and problems by coming to Jesus but Jesus is more concerned about curing their long-term sickness and problem of sin. He is being careful to keep the message and mission of the Father on track.

First it says He spits on the man's eyes, lays His hands on his eyes and then asks the man if he sees anything. Judging by the man's response, how he describes people like trees walking around, it's likely this man did see everything clearly at one time but has since lost it. But then again, He lays His hands on the man's eyes and he looked and his sight was restored to **seeing everything clearly** – meaning he had 20/20 vision.

And the miracle is very **symbolic** of everything that's going on and what He's teaching the disciples. What's He teaching them? What's it symbolic of?

Well, as more of side note, it's **probably a symbolic depiction of the lack of faith in Jesus** in the area of Bethsaida. The Gentiles in the territory we just saw were accepting of Jesus and were glorifying the God of Israel but when Jesus is in these very Jewish territories like Capernaum and Bethsaida, they don't receive Him well. In Matthew Jesus pronounces woe on Capernaum and Bethsaida, saying that the Gentile areas like Tyre and Sidon and Sodom would've repented had they seen all that Christ had done in their cities. So it may be symbolic of the spiritual deadness in the area and symbolic of the partial blindness that is coming to Israel that Israel is currently now in. And it is **partial blindness** Paul said because, He is still saving a remnant until the fullness of Gentiles comes in and when (Rom. 11:25) Jesus Christ appears a second time, He'll open their eyes and they will say blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Israel will see Him clearly.

But more than that, it's a direct lesson for the disciples regarding Jesus' **identity and mission**.

II. **JESUS QUESTIONS THE DISCIPLES ABOUT HIS IDENTITY (VV. 27-33)**

On their way to Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asks the question we've been asking every now and then throughout Mark. Who is this Jesus? People are struggling to identify Him.

A. **Who do *the people* say the I am?**

1. **Some have said He's a lunatic.**

His hometown and some family thinks He's a lunatic who has lost His senses. They even came to get Him once and take Him back home to Nazareth.

2. **Some say liar.**

The Pharisees are going around saying He's a liar and deceiver possessed by Beelzbul.

But the consensus of the everyday Jew seems to be that Jesus is either John or Elijah or a prophet.

3. **John the Baptist**

But to think of Jesus as John the Baptist is outlandish. No one who thought that was thinking straight since John and Jesus lived at the same time. John baptized Jesus. John did no miracles. Jesus is doing many miracles. This is a nonsensical opinion.

4. **Elijah**

Some, because of an OT prophecy that foretold that Elijah would come again before the great and terrible day of the Lord, thought He was Elijah. Remember Elijah never died but was taken up to heaven in a heavenly chariot and whirlwind. We'll study that more in chapter 9. Jesus is not Elijah but John the Baptist came in the spirit of Elijah.

5. **Prophet**

Some say He's just another prophet. The only problem with that one is that no other prophet ever did the things He was doing and to that extent. He even taught differently. He was something totally different and **all of these categories fall short of who Jesus Christ really is. None of these claims see Jesus with the dignity He deserves.**

And that's a good lesson for us. If you don't see Jesus as God in the flesh, you are not perceiving Him correctly, which means you aren't worshipping Him correctly. He is God and is to be worshipped as God.

False teaching would claim otherwise, that He is something less than God and any worship offered to a false idea is a false god and thus an idolatrous thought. So we need to get to know God through His Word. But then we contrast the peoples' opinions with the disciples starting in verse 29. Jesus says,

B. But who you say that I am?

And Peter, the headstrong spokesperson of the group says, "You are the Christ," which means, "You are the Messiah, the Anointed One."

❖ **Christ = a title meaning Messiah, Anointed One**

It's an incredible answer! He's right! And since the disciples are probably all shaking their head in agreement with Peter, we could say they're right! **They have better vision of Jesus than most people.** And in Matthew, Jesus says this testimony is "the rock" that He will build His church on. So anyone who claims otherwise, is not true Church. We as the Church, are to be the pillar and support of this truth that Jesus is God in the flesh. He is the Son of Man – the expected one. Pillars and buttresses hold things up and support it. That's our job. In this world that wants to make less of Him or fun of Him and use His name as a cuss word, we are to hold up the true identity of Jesus Christ that saves people.

But when these guys thought of the Anointed One prophesied about throughout the OT – they thought of the superhuman Savior who was to come and restore the fortunes of Israel. Remove the curse, productive farming, a world at peace, ruling in righteousness, Jerusalem the capital of the world. And I believe He will still do that when He returns but then **Jesus warns them, with a strong, rebuke-like warning not to tell anyone in verse 30.** Well, why is that? Because even though He is the Anointed One and He will come and rule in righteousness, **they still only have partial vision of the Anointed One and the prophecies about Him.** There is more Scripture to be fulfilled than they realize.

What does the full vision look like that they're missing? We see it in verse 31. "He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed and after three days rise again. And He was stating the matter plainly." That's the part of the Anointed One they didn't understand. They understood Jesus is the Christ but didn't understand He had to suffer first! In fact, many Jews were really confused about the OT messiah, and rightly so, because like Isaiah 53, it said He would come and suffer as a **Servant** but then they'd read Daniel 7 where it says the Son of Man would receive a kingdom and come to earth and rule. The differences are so stark that some believed there would be 2 messiahs!

But the disciples, like most people naturally would choose, obviously had their minds on the ruling Messiah. And this is why Peter takes Jesus aside to rebuke Him. I mean, he physically pulls Jesus aside to stop Him from talking like this and rebuke Him. Which made me think, "Do we ever try and stop God from doing His will that's really good for us? And in the end we see that He knew what He was doing all along?"

We've got to careful we don't pray that God would grow us and give us opportunities to grow but then as soon as He gets out the sheers and starts to prune us, we pull away! The man seeing men like trees was pretty theological if you think about it. We don't like being pruned to bear more fruit (Jn. 15:2). John the Baptist's warning to the hypocritical Pharisees was that the tree that doesn't bear good fruit is cut down and thrown in the fire. We are like trees in that the fruit of our lives shows whether or not our faith is in Christ

and we're in a personal relationship with Him. Fruit is never the basis of salvation but it is telling.

You see though, the **intentional two-stage partial healing**. He's showing these men they have partial Messiah vision but they're not seeing the full program. In fact, Jesus is so serious about this that He rebukes Peter by telling him, "Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." He says this because Jesus knows the throne comes a cross and in His testing in the wilderness, Satan too, tempted Him to accept an easy Saviorhood and skip the difficult of the cross by offering Jesus the kingdoms of the world. This warning means we need to be careful about what our interests are.

And we need to ask ourselves, while we're here, what are our interests? Is my interest the same as God's interests or my own? God's interests or man's interests?

❖ **Is your mind set on God's interests or man's and the world's?**

The only way to be set on God's interests is to stay in the Word and under the Word. And if you know you've been a little too set on your wrong interests, be encouraged by the nature of disciples as learners. Jesus doesn't expel His discipleship students and start over with a new class of more prospective students.ⁱⁱ He sticks with them. Keeps teaching and cultivating them and challenging them to set their minds on God's interests.

But really what's God's interest? That we become servants like Jesus.

III. JESUS TEACHES THE TRUE, SERVANT-HEARTED NATURE OF DISCIPLESHIP (VV. 34-38)

That we become a fully-surrendered disciple of Jesus Christ. A follower who also makes disciples. Why? Because if the claim that Jesus is the Christ is true, then there is no greater priority in life.

❖ **The key words in this book are: Immediately, Follow, Disciples, Serve.**

This gospel is all about following Christ and it's the greatest thing you can do with your life. Again, we're at that halfway point where there's sufficient evidence for who Jesus is and now **Jesus is calling for a response from the people, from the disciples, and from you and from me. What are you going to do with Jesus who is the Christ?**

Now **we know and believe that we are saved by grace through faith in Christ and not of ourselves – and that's true – but Jesus doesn't want us to stop there.** He wants us to become fully-devoted disciples who become servants like Him. I think the problem with most church-going Christians today is that they're stuck with this idea that "I'm going to believe in Jesus but please don't preach to me the full vision that He wants me to serve like Jesus or follow Jesus or develop a relationship with Jesus. Please don't mention a cross for me." Even though life is found there.

A. Discipleship involves taking up your cross.

"If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me." I think we have to make the decision to die to self – to die to our agenda. To make a surrender and say, "Lord, take my life and let it be all for You and for Your glory." But then Luke 9:23 says that's a cross to take up *daily*. Each day we continue to make that decision even in the little moments. You stop living for yourself and start living for Him. You deny self. And this is the key to idolatry because all of our idols that we serve in this life are really bowing down before the idol of self. We're not usually this direct but Jesus is very direct here.

He says, “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it.” On the cross and in the gospel, Jesus was laying down His life for the sake of others and so He calls us now who believe in Him to lay our lives down as well, proving our allegiance to Him. I think the full effect of this is felt if we take into account that **Mark’s original audience in Rome is being asked to undergo the intense persecution** of Nero for Christ and some are laying down their lives as martyrs. But I’ll tell you what: every martyr in Christ is more alive than any of us. Therefore, losers are keepers in this case.

❖ **Losers are keepers.**

And this is so backwards from the world and the flesh and the temptations of Satan which say that if you just get this or get that in life, then you’ll happy. The world says the finders are keepers. If you find and get this vacation or that car or this job or that house or that girl or that scholarship or that new gadget or that six pack of abs, then you’ll happy and content. That’s the subconscious mindset we constantly are fed and carry around but we all know it’s a bunch of baloney because no matter how much we try to live for ourselves it never really satisfies or satisfies long term. Beauty fades. Riches rust. And the older we get the more we typically lose those things and if we’re trying to find our happiness in them, we’ll end up a bitter old angry person who missed it and wasted their life.

C.S. Lewis said, “We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition, when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child that wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are too easily pleased.” That’s us living in sin and for the world? Happy with our mudpies while Jesus is offering us fruit from the tree of life in the paradise of God! You see, even though Jesus is being very direct, He’s also being very gracious here by telling us how to find life. This is the reality He’s trying to get across:

If you live for yourself and not the Savior, you lose both yourself and the Savior. But if you live for the Savior and not yourself, you’ll find your true self and forever, the Savior.

I don’t know why but I’ve been thinking of us in light of this as sinking ships. Ships with a bunch of holes in side. And we keep trying to keep ourselves afloat by fervently and tirelessly plugging the holes that are constantly appearing in the side because we love ourselves, we love our ship. And it’s as if Jesus is saying just let the ship sink already. Stop trying to stay afloat let the ship of yourself sink and when you do that, I will raise you up again by My power.

Why walk around with blurry, partial vision that makes you stumble when Jesus is offering you a free set of glasses with a whole new outlook that actually works. The last principle is:

❖ **Outlook determines outcome.ⁱⁱⁱ**

The last verse says, “For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father and with the holy angels.” If you want to right focus, a clear focus, be careful what you’re looking to. Look to the world and this life, you’ll never get it right. But if you look to Jesus and eternal glory you’ll get it right and won’t be ashamed. Put His kingdom first and the rest will be added to you but seek the rest first and lose both.

Shame comes up because crucifixion was a very shameful thing. And to follow Jesus in this world, is to experience some shame like Him. But Jesus is clear that it’s better to be shamed by this world

than shamed by Him when He comes in judgment. We have a choice between surrender or shame it looks like. If we're ashamed of Him, we won't share Him with others in this world but if **we love Him, we can't help but share Him! We talk about what we love.**

But if our outlook is on Christ and His return, we'll experience great reward. This is such a key to perseverance. 1 Peter 1:13 says, "...prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Peter says **more grace is coming. Fix your hope on it.** Paul tells us as well in Colossians 3:1-4, "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

Lord I pray that Your Word would work powerfully in our hearts today to bring about a total surrender to You in this moment and each day. I pray that we would take You and Your word seriously so that we do not miss out like many who have misguidedly lived for themselves and not for You. May we live for the Savior and not self and end up finding our true self in You. Help us, by Your Spirit to see You clearly and the mission You have for us. That we wouldn't be ashamed when You come but have an abundant entrance into eternal glory in Your kingdom with You.

ⁱ *New American Standard Bible.*

ⁱⁱ Chuck Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights: Mark* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Publishers, 2016),

ⁱⁱⁱ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: NT* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2007).