

## 44 Mark 8:22-26

### Sight, But Not Clarity

#### Text

22 And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. 23 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?" 24 And he looked up and said, "I see men, but they look like trees, walking." 25 Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. 26 And he sent him to his home, saying, "Do not even enter the village."

#### Commentary

*22 And they came to Bethsaida.*

Bethsaida means "house of fishing." Bethsaida was located on the northern shores of the Sea of Galilee, next to where the Jordan river enters the sea.

*And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. 23 And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village,*

There is something very touching about being led by the hand somewhere. There is a connection that happens in that action. There is a kind of connection that you can feel when you take the arm of an elderly person to help them across an icy driveway, or in this case when taking the hand of a blind man to lead him. There must be trust in the blind person that he will be led rightly. What can he do if someone cruelly leads him to a place where he does not know and then abandon him? Can you imagine that? This touch communicates the tenderness of Christ in which children would so readily approach him.

*and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him,*

As we saw in the account of the man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, this action is a means by which Christ enters into the mental world of this man. He communicates his intent to heal.

*he asked him, "Do you see anything?" 24 And he looked up and said, "I see men, but they look like trees, walking." 25 Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.*

There are some people today who are pure snake-oil salesmen. They prey upon the needs of individuals promising cures, offering hope but who have no power to affect their state. These healers will sometimes point to this passage to indicate that the healing may take place slowly over time. This account bears no resemblance to that kind of tomfoolery. This man did not have to come back again and again for repeat treatments. He did not spend all his earnings on healing tricks that provided no cure at all. Although Jesus cured this man in two stages, he was cured in a matter of moments. The healing was complete, he could see with great clarity even at a distance, all in a matter of moments. There is no warrant here for such unprincipled hucksters.

*26 And he sent him to his home, saying, "Do not even enter the village."*

It is unknown whether Jesus intends by this that the man should say nothing. This seems to be in line with the earlier admonitions to silence.

## **A God of Means**

This is one of those passages that sometimes causes discomfort in Christians. We are so used to things being all about flash and presentation and pure displays of power and authority that we have a hard time seeing why anyone would do anything except for an ostentatious show of their ability. We may not articulate it quite like that, but that kind of idea does attend our thinking.

While they are of equal worth, one would not do a lay-up if he can soar over someone's head and dunk the ball with authority. If given the choice, we would probably not watch a newbie on the green slopes slowly snow-plowing their way along if we can watch someone ski off a 50' cliff perfectly landing on a steep slope between two rock outcroppings. We celebrate that kind of activity. And if that newbie on the green slopes had the skill and confidence, he too would probably put that skill on display. We have an "if you got it flaunt it" kind of mentality. If your skill is not on display, then you probably don't have any. Whether it is intellectual, or physical, cooking or skiing, boxing or singing, writing or drawing, we want to put our best foot forward.

This mentality can even affect Christians. So we love to watch the Ten Commandments because we see God's power on display. We like the story of Elijah and the 400 prophets of Baal. But then we come to texts like this and it almost seems embarrassing. This is like the firecracker that just sort of fizzled. Wanting to put your best foot forward is not necessarily a bad thing (although most often it is pride-filled), but it is just such a part of the way we work that when we see passages like this we are taken back. Did Jesus goof-up? No, can't be, he is perfect, but it sure looks like it. Is this the spiritual equivalent of Jordon shooting an air-ball at the foul line? Perhaps you are not like this, but there are a good many people who do look at this text with a certain degree of embarrassment. I submit to you that it ought not be like that.

Here is an important truth about God that we need to recognize: God is a God of means. If you read much of Dawkins or listen to much of the New Atheism, it won't be long before you hear them say something like: Intelligent Design, or Creationism puts an end to science. All you have to do is say God did it. How does the rain fall? God did it. How does the flower grow? God did it. How come bubbles are round? Because God made them that way. That is their perception of Christianity's contribution to science.

Their mistake is not knowing that the Christian God is a God of means. We assume that this universe was created by an infinitely intelligent being and therefore this universe has rhyme and reason to it. We believe that God is a God of means. Therefore when we look at the rain falling we expect, because we believe in God, that there will be a means that he makes use of to cause the rain to fall. Moreover, we expect that this means will be a rational and predictable means so that it can be qualitatively set down in formulas and theories.

If God has elected some to life, then why evangelize? That is the same sort of thinking that these atheists maintain. But God works through means. He uses people to spread the gospel through which he brings his elect to salvation. Many other examples could be multiplied; this doctrine really does affect many areas of Christian life and thought. Thus text is another example of God using means. If we take a quick survey of Jesus healing of blind men, not two of the accounts are the same. So why does Jesus use the means that he uses? Why in this text does it take two applications?

## Context

Before we answer that question, let us take a step back and take a look at the context. There is some debate about the placement of this text in the literary structure of Mark. On the one hand, there are a series of parallels from ch 6:31 through ch 8:30. Consider:

There was a feeding of a multitude in 6:31-44 and 8:1-9.  
There was a crossing of the sea and landing in 6:45-56 and 8:10.  
There was conflict with the Pharisees in 7:1-23 and 8:11-13  
There were conversations about bread in 7:24-30 and 8:14-21  
There was a healing in 7:31-36 and in 8:22-26 and finally...  
There was a confession of faith in 7:37 and 8:27-30

Thus the parallel for today's passage structurally is found in ch 7:31-36. In both accounts the people bring a man to Jesus requesting his healing. In both accounts Jesus takes the man aside privately or out of the village. In both accounts Jesus utilizes spittle. These parallels, along with some others seem to complete the reference to Isa 35:1-6

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad;  
the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus;  
2 it shall blossom abundantly  
and rejoice with joy and singing.  
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,  
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.  
They shall see the glory of the Lord,  
the majesty of our God.

3 Strengthen the weak hands,  
and make firm the feeble knees.  
4 Say to those who have an anxious heart,  
"Be strong; fear not!  
Behold, your God  
will come with vengeance,  
with the recompense of God.  
He will come and save you."

5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,  
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;  
6 then shall the lame man leap like a deer,  
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.

That was the first structural note on today's passage, the second one involves an even larger structure. Speaking broadly, the Book of Mark has three major sections to it. The first is his northern ministry, the last is his southern ministry, and then there is a middle section which is his journey from north to south. This middle section is book ended by two miracles: the healing of this blind man and the healing of blind Bar-Timaeus in ch 10. One of the themes of this middle section is discipleship. The crowds have played a big part to this point in the gospel, but they are strangely absent in this section. They will still show up from time to time but it is clear that the disciples, and not the crowds, are now the focus.

## **The Blindness of the Disciples**

While the historicity of this story is not called into question, I believe that it is meant to signify the blindness of the disciples.

While it is sometimes not reflected well in our translations, in the original there are 8 different words for sight out of nine occurrences! All of this redundancy is meant to communicate something to us. Sight is a huge emphasis in this story. It occurs immediately after Jesus accuses the disciples of having eyes but not seeing. There is a strong contrast between the blindness of the disciples from last week and the sight this week.

It is also interesting that Jesus normally spoke words of commands in his miracles. He would command ears to be opened or demons to come out or the dead to rise or the lame to walk. His question in our text is odd. After performing his miracles, Jesus never asked if the demons had come out or if the deaf could hear or if the fever left.

Given that this section focuses much more on the disciples, there is an image here of the blindness of the disciples being slowly taken away. We have already seen the blindness of the disciple declared last week. Jesus seems to take his disciples away from the crowds just as he did this blind man in order to grant them partial sight. Next week is Peter's good confession of Jesus as the Christ. They see Jesus as the Messiah but they still do not see clearly. It will not be until after his death and resurrection that they will see with clarity.

## **Our Blindness**

It seems fitting to apply this text to us in a way very similar to how it pointed to the disciples. We too were blind. We too were once children of wrath the same as the rest. We were deaf to the call of Christ, blind to our need, dead in our ability to respond in the flesh. But God has our best in mind. He takes us by the hand and sets us apart from the crowds. He is the one who sovereignly brings sight to our dark world!

But our sight, as the blind man's and as the disciples, is not perfect. The same truth is conveyed in our regeneration. We have been born again! We have been given life! But just as newborns need to grow, so do we. We need milk at first. We need to be coddled and nurtured. But the

expectation is that we grow into a full person, the measure of whom is Christ. We have sight, but we see imperfectly, as through a glass, darkly. But we must not stay in this place of vague vision. Perfect maturity and perfect sight will come only upon our entrance into eternity, but there can and should be growth in this life.

In 1 Cor 13 Paul states:

Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. **9** For we know in part and we prophesy in part, **10** but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. **11** When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. **12** For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

We now see, but we do not see with perfect clarity. As we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, we should recognize the grace that has been given to us and extend that same grace to others. When we attain a certain level of doctrinal understanding, we need to grant grace for God to work in the hearts and minds of others. God will take us through a journey but when we arrive after years of struggles, we turn around and demand instant results from others.

Let us continually strive for greater and greater excellence in things, but let us do it for the right reason. Let us encourage one another on in the Christian walk, but let us do so with grace and humility. Soli Deo Gloria!