

Mark 8:22

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[0 : 00] Turn in your Bibles, if you would, to Mark chapter 8. Mark chapter 8, page 844 in your pew Bible. Mark chapter 8, we'll read beginning in verse 22.

Mark 8, verse 22. And they came to Bethsaida, and some people brought to him a blind man 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 men, 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. Thus far the reading of God's word. May he bless it to us. Well, there's no doubt that we live in a highly visual age, probably the most visual age in human history.

[1 : 22] It wasn't always like this. In the ancient world, of course, it wasn't quite as visual as it is today. Maybe an odd cave painting here or there, but it was an oral culture. And people would sit around the campfire, and they would tell stories. And these stories would be passed down for centuries.

This is where we get the Gilgamesh epic, or Beowulf, or even Homer's stories. And then, for centuries, this was the way of life. And then we have the invention of the printing press. And then we become a written culture. Published material becomes affordable, and common people can own books, and literacy rates skyrocket. And this way of life lasted until just a few years ago, when we became a digital culture.

We don't read books made of paper and ink anymore. We read ones and zeros on a screen. Most of us walk around with HD cameras in our pocket.

Seeing is believing has never been more true. We must see to believe. But imagine if you lost your ability to see.

[2 : 25] Those of you who may have struggled with visual impairment know how debilitating this condition can be. All of life has to change to accommodate this condition. Seeing is no longer believing for those who struggle with their eyesight, for those who walk in darkness.

But even more debilitating than physical blindness is spiritual blindness. This is our condition apart from the regenerative power of the Holy Spirit. We're blind to the things of God. We're dead in our trespasses and sin.

We cannot see our triune God as creator, as redeemer, as the maker of all things new. Apart from Christ, we walk in darkness. The Word of God speaks quite often about blindness.

In the ancient world, it was much more common than it is today. Some scholars estimate as many as much as 10% of the population suffered from some level of blindness. This was mainly due to poor sanitation and the unchecked glare of the sun.

And you can imagine how much Moses wished he would have had a pair of sunglasses. He's walking around the desert for 40 years. This condition was a common part of everyday life, though. But when Scripture speaks of blindness, it often refers to a spiritual condition.

[3 : 37] So in Deuteronomy chapter 16, it refers to corrupt judges whose eyes are blinded. Isaiah 44 mentions idolaters who are blind in their false worship. We see Jesus repeatedly in the Gospels condemning the scribes and Pharisees for being blind to the ways of God.

For those with physical blindness, there is no hope to be cured. There is no miracle cream or special pill. This condition could not be remedied by self-effort. The same is true for spiritual blindness back then and today.

You cannot work your way out of this condition. You can only look to the work of another. The one who can bring us from darkness to light. And this is why Messiah came.

Only the Messiah can open the eyes of the blind, both physically and spiritually. It's only through his work that we see the truths of God's word. The greatness of our sin and misery. But the offer of forgiveness with God and reconciliation with him. And we see this in our passage today here in Mark chapter 8. First we see that the Messiah has come to heal us of physical blindness.

[4 : 45] And second, the Messiah has come to heal spiritual blindness. Because Jesus has healed us of spiritual blindness, we must consistently be reminded of the nature of his work.

So first we see that Jesus has come to heal physical blindness. We see that the disciples, Jesus' disciples, come to Bethsaida. They just crossed the Sea of Galilee.

They come to Bethsaida. And they're introduced to this man born blind. We see his utter dependence upon others to help him. He's brought to Jesus. Some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him.

He's unable to come to Christ by his own power. He cannot reach the Messiah through his own effort. So his friends lead him to the Savior. This was no chance encounter that we see in the Gospels where Jesus is walking on the road and someone calls out to him to heal him.

No. This was a purposeful seeking out of the Savior. Not only do they bring this man to Christ, but once they're there, they beg Jesus to touch him. To heal him.

[5 : 51] They weren't hired by the blind man at some sort of taxi service. And they don't just bring him to Jesus and say, Okay, I hope it goes well. No. They bring him to the Savior and they implore him to touch him because they know that he is the one who can make their friend well.

This blind man has pretty good friends who go out of their way to bring him to the Messiah. Just as a side note for us, this is a picture of prayer. We cannot bring our friends to the literal feet of Jesus, but we can lift them up to him in prayer.

Beseech him on their behalf. Well, Jesus exhibits great compassion to this blind man. He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village.

This blind man who was brought to Jesus is now led by Jesus. One who is rejected by society due to his blindness. Yet Christ humbles himself and touches him, comforting him.

Jesus doesn't have the assumption that the disciples had when they see another blind man in John chapter 9. They say, Who sinned? This man or his parents that he was born blind.

[6 : 57] No doubt they're just repeating the common assumption of the day that any debilitating illness was due directly to some person's sin. No. Jesus doesn't look at him as someone to be condemned for his sin, but he's one made in God's image.

And today he would be the object of the Savior's love. Now, of course, the blind man's friends who brought him to Jesus could have led him out of the city.

But Jesus personally takes him by the hand. No doubt he's talking to him as they walk out of the city. He's hearing about his life. Hearing about his story.

This man probably never told about his life to anyone else. No one asked him how his day was. No one cared to know him. He spent his life in the fringes of society. Yet the creator of the world is giving him his undivided attention.

Christ leads him out of the city and away from the crowds in order to focus his entire attention on him. You see, at this point in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus begins turning away from the crowds.

[8 : 02] He's away from all the multitudes. He says earlier in Mark chapter 8 that he's not there to perform signs. He's there to instruct his disciples on the nature of his Messiahship. He cannot be distracted from his duty by the crowds who want him to perform parlor tricks so they can be amused.

Wow. The next thing he does seems highly unusual to us. He spits in this man's eyes. It seems rather disgusting to our 21st century ears.

But you have to remember, these are the days before hand sanitizer. They weren't so worried about every germ as we are today. And saliva was actually believed to be a healing agent in the ancient world.

There are multiple miracles reported involving saliva. Perhaps the most famous miracle was allegedly performed by the soon-to-be Emperor Vespasian, who is the Roman general who sacked Jerusalem in AD 70.

Allegedly, allegedly, he healed someone of blindness with saliva, adding to his legend on the way to the Roman throne. Who knows if that was true. So Jesus could have been using this convention for

his own act of healing, as he did previously in Mark chapter 7.

[9 : 13] He heals a deaf man using saliva. Or he simply could have been cleaning dirt from the man's eyes. You can imagine, first century Palestine, it's very dry, very dusty. This man who doesn't use his eyes, no doubt.

Dirt would build up. Things would have to be cleared away before Jesus can open his eyes. He knows that this man is about to see. Either way, this act demonstrates the closeness of attention that Jesus gives this man.

This intimate connection that he has with this blind man. Again, Jesus touches him. This time, a healing touch. This man who was regarded as defiled, an outcast of society.

He only would have been touched by others who in some way were defiled themselves. Yet, Jesus touches him. Now, this touch of Christ, this healing touch, is a sign of the age to come, breaking into this present evil age.

You remember in the Old Covenant, the Old Testament, the Levitical law. If you are ceremonially clean, and you touch something that is ceremonially unclean, what happens? It's instantly, you're unclean.

[10 : 27] So if you're riding down the road in your ox cart, there's a dead animal blocking the road. You get down, you move the dead animal out of the way. Instantly, you're unclean. And you must be purified. The unclean corrupts the clean.

The unholy corrupts the holy. But now, with Christ's advent, the kingdom of God is at hand, and we get a foretaste of the redemption that is coming.

Now, when the holy touches the unholy, the unholy is transformed. The unholy becomes holy in Christ.

We see this throughout the Gospels. You remember the woman with the issue of blood. Matthew, Mark, and Luke, both, all three, recount her story. For 12 years, she has this condition.

Every day of her life, she was unclean. Can you imagine? Her daily toil. Never once, not knowing a day when she could be clean. And she comes to Jesus and touches him.

[11 : 34] And what happens? Is he defiled? No. Instantly, she is made clean. The unholy becomes holy when it comes in contact with the Savior.

The same is true for the prostitutes, the tax collectors, and sinners. When Jesus hangs out with them, is he defiled? Of course not. He makes them holy. They don't corrupt him.

He purifies them. This concept is absolutely radical. And it horrified the first century Jews, the scribes and Pharisees, who were so proud of their adherence to the law and their ceremonial cleanliness.

They would not even come within feet of someone who was unclean. And they see Jesus touching those who are outcasts and defiled. And yet, he makes them clean.

He transformed them. And this concept is only beginning with the advent of Christ, the coming of the Holy Spirit. The kingdom of God is being extended throughout the earth until one day all will be made clean.

[12 : 39] All the unholy will be holy. All will be transformed. Because Christ will make all things new. This is the power of our Savior. And he touches the blind man and he asks him for the results.

Do you see anything? And the blind man gives an interesting response. And he looked up and said, I see men, but they look like trees walking. He can now see, but only partially.

The healing is not complete. So Jesus touches him again. And it seems odd that he would heal in this two-fold manner. It's the only time in the New Testament that we see this. And he does it for a very important reason, which we'll see in a minute.

But with this second touch, Mark gives us a three-fold description. He opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. There's no doubt as to the effectiveness of this second touch.

It is complete and total. Now, most likely for the same reason that Jesus led him out of the village to avoid the crowds, he now informs the blind man, do not even enter the village.

[13 : 44] Again, Christ is focusing on his disciples. He's not there to perform signs for the crowds. He's there to instruct the disciples on the nature of his Messiahship.

Now, with this healing of physical blindness, Jesus is giving concrete proof that he is indeed the Messiah. In all of Scripture, only the Messiah opens the eyes of the blind.

Many miracles are performed. People are even raised from the dead. But only the Messiah can open the eyes of those who do not see. After Christ seals that blind man in John chapter 9, the Pharisees question him, and he responds, Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind.

This fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah, that when the Messiah comes, the eyes of the blind shall be opened. In Matthew chapter 11, John the Baptist is in prison.

And he's about to die, and he needs one last confirmation that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. That he is who he says he is. Perhaps John's expectations of the Messiah's kingdom hasn't come true.

[14:51] If the kingdom of heaven is at hand as I've been preaching, why am I in jail? And he needs to know that Jesus is the one. So he sends his disciples to Jesus and asks him, Are you the one who is to come?

Or shall we look to another? And Jesus does not hesitate. He says, Go and tell John what you hear and see. The blind receive their sight. And he lists other things.

He says, You want proof that I'm the Messiah? Here's the first proof. The blind now see. That's all the proof you need. Only the Messiah can do this. Only the Messiah opens the eyes of the blind.

We see here in our passage that the Messiah has come to heal physical blindness as only he can. But more importantly, he has come to heal spiritual blindness. We see this clearly in this passage. Now what's the blind man's spiritual condition? We don't know. Perhaps he believed. We hope he believed. But physical healing is not direct proof of spiritual healing. We know many people in the Gospels who were physically healed by Jesus and didn't believe in him as Messiah.

[15:51] But the blind man's lack of spiritual sight is not the most important in this passage. It's the disciples' spiritual blindness that is the key. They are the main focus of this narrative, yet they appear nowhere in it.

You see, the main question of the first half of the Gospel of Mark is, Who is Jesus? And the disciples repeatedly get this answer wrong. They don't know what to make of Jesus. They think he's the Messiah, but he's not really the Messiah that they were looking for.

And so he feeds the 5,000 in chapter 5. And then in chapter 8, he feeds 4,000. And he rebukes the Pharisees for demanding a sign. And as they're crossing the Sea of Galilee after these events, he's crossing with the disciples and he uses their lack of bread to warn them of the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod.

But the disciples are hung up on the fact that they don't have bread. They're consumed by the God of their bellies. And they grumble and complain, just like Israel in the wilderness. So Jesus rebukes them in verse 18. Having eyes, do you not see?

Having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the 5,000, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up? They said to him, 12. And the seven for the 4,000?

[17:06] How many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up? They said to him, seven. He said to them, Do you not yet understand? The answer to that question is no.

They don't understand. They don't really know who he is or what he came to do. They don't understand the main theme of the Gospel of Mark, which is the king and his kingdom. Who is Jesus and what is his mission?

They're blind to who Jesus is. And to demonstrate their condition, Mark basically gives the reader what is a giant sermon illustration. The disciples are just as seeing impaired as the blind man when he first comes to Christ.

But there is hope. Just after this healing comes the centerpiece of Mark's Gospel. Jesus and the disciples go to Caesarea Philippi. Jesus asks the questions, Who do people say that I am?

Disciples tell him. Some say John the Baptist. Some say Elijah. Some say other prophets. And Jesus asks the most important question that anyone can ask. Who do you say that I am?

[18:10] Everyone at some point in life has to answer this question. Who do you say Jesus is? Is he a great teacher? Is he a religious sage who taught us to love one another?

Or is he the Son of God? If you've never been asked this question before today, today is the day to answer. Who do you say Jesus is? Peter answers, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. In Matthew's account, Jesus tells him, Flesh and blood didn't reveal this to you, but the Father who is in heaven. Just as the blind man's eyes were opened, so too Peter's eyes are now open to who Jesus is.

He came to this conclusion, not through careful reasoning and contemplation. He didn't weigh the evidence and decide in Christ's favor. No. He was completely blind in darkness until the Father opened his eyes and enabled him to see Jesus as Messiah.

So, imagine being in a first century church and we receive our copy of the Gospel of Mark in the post. You know this is how it took place in the first century.

[19 : 17] Paul or one of the gospel writers would write a letter, they'd write a gospel, and they would send it by a messenger through the postal route. And so what would happen is the church would gather together and the messenger would bring the letter or the gospel before the congregation.

They would all be there in one place and he would read the entire letter. He'd read the entire gospel in one city. And incidentally, if you've never listened to the Gospel of Mark on audio, check it out. It's really amazing to hear it aloud. You can find it on the internet. It takes about 90 minutes if you listen all the way through. And the action comes alive. This is how it was originally meant to be consumed.

You've heard it. And the Gospel of Mark is like a comic book. There's just action taking place one right after the other. Jesus is doing such amazing things and this really comes alive when you hear it audio.

And so we would be gathered together and we'd hear the messenger reading the Gospel. And we would hear the first chapters of the Gospel of Mark and the disciples are confused. They don't know what to make of Jesus. And then we get to chapter 8 and he tells them, you have eyes but you don't see.

[20 : 22] And we think, they're not getting it. What's wrong? And then we hear the story of the blind man and we think, why is this happening now? And then we hear Peter's confession and we think, yes, they get it. The disciples see. Finally.

But then the messenger keeps reading in verse 31 of chapter 8. 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 said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, get behind me, Satan.

For you are not setting your mind on the things of God but on the things of man. It can't be. They recognize Jesus as Messiah but not the crucified King.

They take two steps forward and one step back. Their eyes are opened by the Father. But yet they do not have full sight. They don't see as clearly as the blind man did.

[21 : 28] This is why the blind man is healed in two stages. Some critics like to say that Jesus didn't have enough power in the first touch so he had to have another run at it. He just raised Jairus' daughter from the dead.

Of course he can open the blind man's eyes. No. The blind man is healed partially to demonstrate the partial sight of the disciples. They think they see but it's not clear yet.

The disciples see Jesus as Messiah but as the Messiah they want him to be. They say, oh yes, you're the one for whom Israel has waited. You're the one sent from God and we're happy to sit on your right hand and left hand as you ride into Jerusalem on a white stallion, overthrow the Romans, establish your political kingdom.

We're happy to be part of a glorious kingdom with a conquering king. But they wanted no part of a suffering Messiah. One who was rejected by elders, the chief priests and scribes.

One who was killed by the hands of the Romans. That was unthinkable. So unthinkable that Peter has the gall to rebuke Jesus for mentioning such things.

[22 : 37] The disciples see but not yet clearly. They wanted the theology of glory. He offered the theology of the cross. They wanted a golden throne next to his.

He offered a wooden cross on his right and his left. They wanted their lives to be saved. He said, you must lose it all for my sake. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?

What does it profit a disciple if he gains a seat in the restored kingdom of Israel if he does not have the Messiah to die for his sins? The disciples see but not clearly.

They don't see clearly in chapter 9 when he foretells his death and resurrection. A second time they get confused in chapter 10. A third time he foretells his death and resurrection. You remember after

this it's James and John are jockeying for the prime seats in the kingdom. They won't see clearly until after the crucifixion, after the resurrection, and even after the ascension. It's not until the day of Pentecost when they get the full picture of the crucified king.

[23 : 37] As Peter stands up in Acts 2.36 and he says, Let all of the house of Israel know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.

They finally get it. The Lord and Christ is the crucified Jesus. No longer do they tell people like the blind man not to say anything. No, they are now eyewitnesses to his resurrection.

They take the word of the suffering Messiah to the ends of the earth as they are empowered by the Holy Spirit. They realize that Christ has died for their sins, that he was buried, that he was raised again for their justification. They clearly see the truths of who Jesus is and what he came to do. Their spiritual eyes have finally been opened. Of course, we are blessed to stand on this side of the cross and the resurrection.

We have the full revelation of God, unlike the disciples here in Mark chapter 8. We're privy to the end of the grand history of redemption. We've received the Holy Spirit. We see how Christ has sent the gospel to the ends of the earth.

[24 : 37] We know that Satan is bound and that the church flourishes and we await our King in power and glory. But so often we want that power and glory now. We want the triumph of the age to come today.

We don't want to suffer as the church militants. We want victory and success in our lives. We forget that we live in this present evil age and we demand all the benefits of the age to come in this life. Like the disciples, we want the theology of glory and not the theology of the cross. The theology of the cross is what Martin Luther called the suffering of Christians for the cause of Christ.

Just as Simon the Cyrene bore the cross of Jesus on the way to Calvary so too we are called to suffer to carry the cross. To suffer for his sake. Now this doesn't earn us any merit with God.

It just reminds us of the suffering of Christ and the fallenness of this world. The theology of the cross is contrasted with the theology of glory which seeks to avoid the cross of Christ.

[25 : 37] It wants all the benefits of the age to come in the here and now. We wonder why we should have to suffer for Christ now. We want to skip the suffering and get to the good part.

Let's get to the end where we get all the good stuff and fast forward through this suffering. We want perfect peace and contentment. That's what the disciples wanted. And so often it's what we want. In the 16th century there was a pastor named Friedrich Myconius who wrote The History of the Reformation 1517-1542. And he writes of the indulgence controversy in 1517 and 18.

If you've seen the Luther movie you remember it's a very good movie by the way. You remember the indulgences where Tetzl comes rolling into town and he's selling indulgences which are pieces of paper that can buy you time off of purgatory for you or your loved ones.

And it's at this time during the indulgence controversy that Luther is preaching in a tiny broken down chapel at the Wittenberg monastery and Myconius notes that this chapel actually resembled artists' rendition of the stable in Bethlehem where Christ is born.

[26 : 47] And Luther's battling Rome for selling indulgences and Rome is using the money to build St. Peter's Basilica in Rome which is the height of wealth and opulence and grandeur.

No place like it in the world. And Myconius notes in this poor miserable wretched chapel. God let His dear Holy Gospel and the dear child Jesus be born again in these last times.

That's the theology of the cross. But our memories are so short and we know that Christ has made us a new creation and He's granted a citizenship in the heavenly kingdom but we want that kingdom now and so we grumble and we complain and we grow cynical and we wonder why we hear bad news from the doctor and we wonder why we suffer financial hardship.

But the good news is that even though we're forgetful and we set our minds on the things of men and not the things of God our Savior is patient with us just as He was with the disciples no matter how many times He had to explain to the disciples the nature of His kingdom and who He was as Messiah not once does He lose His temper.

He doesn't fire His disciples and hire new ones. No. Our Savior knows our weaknesses and He knows that our memories are short and He's always long-suffering with us despite our daily return to partial sight and our focus on ourselves.

[28 : 13] But we have even better news than the disciples originally had. We have the Holy Spirit who's there to help us. Jesus tells His disciples it's better that I go away because I will send a

comforter to you.

We have this advocate who dwells within us to convict us of our short-sightedness remind us of the Gospel. He's there to strengthen us to sanctify us even when we don't feel like it even when life is a struggle the Holy Spirit is there for us.

He is the one as Chuck preached this morning our roots go deep into the Word of God. Who brings our roots down there? The Holy Spirit. He is bringing us to Christ. He's reminding us of all the promises that we have in Him.

So we must not allow our eyes that see go back to partial sight. The Messiah has come to heal us of spiritual blindness as only He can and this is why we must consistently be reminded of who Jesus is and the nature of His kingdom.

We must look forward to the day when He returns in power and glory for it is then that we will experience the kingdom of God in its fullness and we shall be like Him for we shall see Him just as He is.

[29 : 21] Let's bow together in prayer. Our merciful God who is pleased to condescend and to speak to us through Your Word grant us the grace that we may not be mere hearers of Your Word but doers also.

Give us the grace of Your Holy Spirit that we may believe what has been promised to us. May we bring glory and honor to Your name in all that we do as You conform us to the image of Your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

All of this Father we ask in the name of Christ. Amen.