

Spiritual Blindness

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[0 : 00] Open up to the Gospel of Mark, chapter 8. We're going to pick up where we left off last week in verse 22,! And we're going to read all the way down through chapter 9, verse 1.

But our focus this morning will really be in verses 22 through 26. It's going to take us at least two, maybe three weeks to cover all of these verses in the depth and the detail that I want us to. But so that we can grasp the context, and so that we can see what verses 22 through 26 are really pointing us towards, we're going to read all of these verses this morning, and we're going to touch on most of this passage at some point this morning.

So let's start reading in verse 22 and ask you guys to stand with me as we read. Mark writes, 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.

[1 : 11] 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.

And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, Who do people say that I am? And they told him, John the Baptist.

And others say Elijah. And others one of the prophets. And he asked them, But who do you say that I am? Peter answered him, You are the Christ. And he strictly charged 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 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.

[2 : 17] And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake, and the gospels will save it.

For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

And he said to them, Truly I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.

Let's pray. Father, we ask you to take your word right now, to open our minds and our hearts to understand it, to receive it, and to be nourished by it.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. The Bible actually uses a number of different images to describe what it means for us to be fallen, sinful, lost people.

[3 : 35] And in fact, that term lost is itself an image that the Bible uses to help us to understand what it really means to be a sinner, what it really means to be separated from God and under the wrath of God.

And so, for instance, another image that the Bible uses is that of slavery. Jesus, in the Gospel of John, says that everyone who sins is a slave of sin.

And then Paul picks up on that exact same metaphor, and he says in Romans chapter 6, that since we are no longer slaves of sin, we don't have to obey its desires anymore.

In other words, Paul says, there's an exchange that takes place when you trust in Christ so that you go from being a slave of sin and serving its desires to a slave of righteousness, a servant of God and serving God's desires, and now righteous desires begin to be birthed in you.

So you go from slave to sin to slave of righteousness. Or another common image used in the Scriptures to describe lostness or sinfulness is that of spiritual death.

[4 : 38] So, the Apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians chapter 2 that before we came to Christ, he says that we were dead in our trespasses and sins.

Spiritually dead. Unable to make any spiritual progress. Unable to trust in Christ. Unable to believe in the Gospel. Unable to do any of the things that we need to do to be saved.

And yet, he says that God in His mercy and grace, and a few verses later says, but God made us alive together with Christ. Why? So that by grace through faith we might be saved, he says a few verses later.

And all of that, he says, is a gift of God. So we are first spiritually dead, and then made alive by God's mercy.

Spiritual death. And then another image that we're going to focus on this morning that we're going to see used in this passage to describe what it means to be sinful and lost is that of spiritual blindness.

[5 : 36] Now that is a category of imagery that's used really throughout the Bible. So even if you turn back to the prophets, to the book of Isaiah, in Isaiah chapter 42, I want you to turn there because I want you to see this.

In Isaiah chapter 42, this is in the middle actually towards the beginning of these what are called the servant songs, which are poems or songs that are written about the coming Messiah, the servant of God.

And listen to this, in Isaiah 42 verse 1, this is what we read. God says, Behold my servant. So that's Jesus. That's the Messiah. Behold my servant whom I uphold, my chosen in whom my soul delights.

I've put my spirit upon him. He will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice or make it heard in the street. A bruised reed he will not break and a faintly burning wick he will not quench.

He will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint. He will not be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth and the coastlands wait for his law. This is all praise to God, praise from God toward the Messiah about what the Messiah is going to accomplish among the nations.

[6 : 49] And then this is what we read. Thus says the Lord God, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, and who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it.

I am the Lord. And he's speaking to the Messiah now, to his servant. I am the Lord. I have called you in righteousness. I will take you by the hand and keep you.

I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison, those who sit in darkness.

So from the point of view of the prophets, God spoke through the prophets to teach them that he was going to send his servant. He was going to send his deliverer. And through that deliverer, God would give sight to those who are blind.

That's you and that's me. That's everyone on the face of the earth. That's the nations that he speaks about in the earlier verses of Isaiah 42 that we read there. All people scattered throughout all the nations, everyone on the face of the earth, is born in sin and therefore born into a state of spiritual blindness.

[7 : 56] This is why in 2 Corinthians chapter 4, Paul says that the primary work of Satan is to blind unbelievers in order that he might keep them from seeing the light of the gospel.

That's what Satan does. So spiritual blindness is something that affects every single person on the face of the earth and it is something that Satan comes along and he strengthens and he establishes and he furthers in our lives.

He wants to keep us blind. Blindness ultimately is caused by sin. But Satan working through sin comes along and also causes and furthers and deepens spiritual blindness so that we might never

see the light of the gospel that's able to come and give us sight.

And so now we come here to this passage in Mark chapter 8, in the middle of chapter 8, and we read here a story about a blind man. And one of the questions that you sometimes have to ask that I've told you that we've been walking through the gospel of Mark is why did Mark choose to include this particular story from the life of Christ?

We know that those who wrote the gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, we know that they selectively chose what parts of the life of Christ to include in their tellings of His life and ministry.

[9 : 16] We know that they did that. John even tells us at the end of his gospel that if everything that Jesus had done had been written down, that there wouldn't be enough books in the world to contain a record of everything that He did.

So each of these gospels is a selective retelling of the ministry and life and death and resurrection of Jesus. And sometimes we need to pause and say, why include that particular story?

We know that as they're telling the story of Christ that they're skipping over major sections and they're skipping over numerous miracles and things that Jesus did. So why at this point, why include this particular story?

Because it really interrupts the flow of things. We've seen Jesus has been traveling all over the place in the last couple of chapters. He left Capernaum, His home base for operations in Galilee. He went outside of Israel to the regions of Tyre and Sidon and then He made His way all the way around to the opposite side of the Sea of Galilee and spent some time there in what's called the Decapolis, this Gentile territory on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

[10 : 22] Hopped in a boat, went back to Jewish territory where He was there for a very short time and then He sailed across to where we are today in this city called Bethsaida. And then in verse 27, we're told that Jesus went on with His disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, which is much further north.

And so this little incident, this little detail from verses 22 through 26 slows down the progress of the story. Jesus is traveling, the disciples are moving quickly.

Remember, He's only back in Galilee just for a flash when He has another confrontation with the Pharisees and He takes off. So why slow the story down in Bethsaida?

Why not just move ahead to the good stuff up north in Caesarea Philippi where Jesus has this conversation with the disciples about who He really is? Where He rebukes Peter for Peter's failure to understand what He came to do.

Why spend time on that, Mark? Why tell this particular story? Because it's not a story that in and of itself necessarily emphasizes the power of Christ.

[11 : 25] I mean, Christ, for some reason here, has to do two miracles in order to completely heal this man's blindness. It's not a weakness on Christ's part because we're going to see Him just a couple of chapters later easily heal two blind men.

We've seen Him calm storms, feed thousands on two different occasions with hardly any food at all. We've seen Jesus raise the dead and command demons and they obey Him. We've seen Jesus do things that are much greater works of power than healing a blind man.

And yet this story certainly is not here to emphasize that great power of Jesus because here in this story, Jesus does two things to heal the blind man. So it's not as if Mark paused and included this story so that we might marvel once again at the power of Christ.

There has to be some other reason for including this story here. And I think my contention is that Mark includes this event in his account so that we might understand what happens in the verses that follow.

Because the verses that follow show us graphically the spiritual blindness of Jesus' disciples. And this man's healing is meant for both his disciples and the discussions that they're going to have as they move down the road towards Caesarea Philippi.

[12 : 42] And for us as we read it, this miracle here in Mark chapter 8 is going to help us to understand both what spiritual blindness looks like and the normal pattern by which sight is restored to those who are spiritually blind.

That's what I think is happening in these verses. Now I keep saying over and over Mark chose this story. Mark included this story. I don't want you by any means to confuse that.

To think that because we call it a story or we say that Mark decided to include this part of the story that that means that it's not true. Everything that we find in the Gospels is absolutely true.

It's historical fact. Jesus healed this blind man in Bethsaida just as surely as George Washington and his soldiers crossed the Delaware River just as surely as Abraham Lincoln delivered the Gettysburg Address just as surely as you and I are right here, right now.

This is real history. So I'm not asking why did Mark make up this story because he didn't. I'm asking why did Mark include this particular part of the ministry of Jesus in his account.

[13:49] And my answer is to illustrate what spiritual blindness is and what the normal pattern of having that blindness removed and sight restored looks like.

So let's take a look briefly at the story and then I want to connect it with the rest of the passage. Verse 22, they arrive in Bethsaida and it says, some people brought to him a man, 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. So Jesus is initially in the village. He's in the city of Bethsaida and while he's there some people bring to him a blind man which makes sense.

How else would a blind man be able to find him? So they lead him to Christ and then Jesus does something odd. Jesus takes him outside of the village.

It says that he leads him out out of town and it says when he had spit on his eyes and laid hands on him he asked him, do you see anything? This is a strange way to go about healing someone but it's not the first time that he's done this.

[14:55] We just saw him a couple of weeks ago there was a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment and what did Jesus do? He spits on his hand and he touches the man's tongue. This is weird but it's not the first time we've seen this kind of weirdness from Jesus in Mark.

It's strange but this is exactly what he does. He spits in his eyes, do you see anything? He says.

The man looks up and says, I see men but they look like trees walking.

So he can see what clearly are men because they're moving and walking about but he can't see clearly at all. Everything is blurry so that he can't make out any details of who they are and probably the only way that he knew that these images that he could see, the only way that he knew that they were people was because they were moving around and trees don't move around.

So he says, it looks like trees but I know it's not trees because they're moving and they're walking around so I'm going to say that I'm seeing people here but I can't really see very well at all.

In verse 25, then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again and he opened his eyes. His sight was restored and he saw everything clearly. You see the contrast there?

[16:03] Initially, everything is unclear, blurry, difficult to see and now that Jesus lays his hands on him, everything is crystal clear. So it's a two-stage healing here.

First, he initially restores some amount of sight so the man can make out some things around him and then he restores it fully and completely. And that's what we're going to see unfold in the rest of this passage for the disciples.

So that you see in verses 27 through 30, you see Peter correctly identify who Jesus is. Who do you say that I am?

Jesus asks him. Peter says, You're the Christ. He's right, Peter. Peter can now, he can see something. He can understand something correctly. But then right after that, we're going to see that his sight is limited because Jesus begins to teach them and to explain to them why he's going to have to go to Jerusalem and suffer and die on a cross.

And Peter rebukes him. So Peter can, he can see some spiritual truths. He can see some spiritual realities. But others, he's not able to see. Others, he can't quite understand.

[17:13] He hasn't yet grasped. And that's the way that it works for most people. Most people begin to understand and begin to apprehend certain things that are true about the gospel, certain things that are true about Jesus.

But it takes time before they fully understand and before sight is fully received by them so that they can understand Christ, see him for who he is.

That's the normal pattern of going from spiritual blindness to spiritual sight. Now let's ask some questions here about this issue of spiritual blindness. What exactly does spiritual blindness do to us?

And in this passage, I can see three things pretty distinctly. There's probably more, but in this passage, I see three things distinctly that spiritual blindness does to us. First of all, it can, at times, keep us from understanding who Christ is.

That's why Jesus begins with the question, who do you say that I am? Who do people say that I am? And they give all kinds of answers to that. Well, some people say Elijah. That's what many people thought.

[18:16] Some say John the Baptist. That's what Herod thought. And then others say that you're one of the prophets. So there's all sorts of answers out there about who Jesus is.

The world's no different today. There are multiple answers to the question of who Jesus is. Some say that He was a great teacher. Some say that He was a political revolutionary.

Some say that He was an angelic being. There are all sorts of answers that people give to the question of who Christ is, but the answer that the New Testament gives us is that He is the divine Son of God.

He's the Christ. He's the Messiah. He's the fulfillment of all the promises of the Old Testament. And at least to a certain degree, Peter gets it right. You're the Christ. But most people don't even get that far.

Most people remain unable to see Him for who He is because of the depth of spiritual blindness in their hearts. And then secondly, spiritual blindness will many times keep us from being able to understand not only who Christ is, but keeping us from understanding what Christ accomplished on the cross.

[19:25] That's what happens as we move through here. Jesus is trying to teach them about the atonement. He's teaching about why He must go to Jerusalem. Why He has to die on a cross.

And Peter, who gave the right answer to the first question, completely bombs. No, Lord, this can't happen to You. He rebukes Him.

And the language that's used here in the original language is strong. Peter gives a strong rebuke to Jesus. Jesus, no. This isn't going to happen. And Jesus responds just as strongly, get behind me, Satan.

For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man. There's always a difference between the way that God accomplishes things and the ways in which we would accomplish things if we were in charge.

We would not send our Son into the world to die on behalf of the world. That's how God saves humanity. We wouldn't do it that way. We wouldn't send Him to bear God's wrath, to bear our own wrath if we were God.

[20:28] That's exactly what God chooses to do. Peter is like us. This can't happen, Jesus. This can't possibly be the way in which God is going to rescue His people.

It's not going to happen this way. Jesus says, you're thinking like a man. Your mind is on human things. You need to begin to think God's thoughts after Him.

You need to begin to understand things from God's perspective because the prophets had foretold this. In Isaiah chapter 53, we read about the servant that He would bear our sins.

That the Lord would lay upon Him the iniquity of us all. This is all foretold in the prophets. Jesus is not telling them anything that's new here. And yet, they still don't get it.

They still don't understand. How many different ways have been imagined by people by which they might approach God?

[21:29] If we devise it, it's never going to be through a suffering Savior. We would never imagine it that way. We would never think of things that way. So that people, most people assume that they will be able to approach God on the basis of their own merits because they're pretty good, because they're better than this guy over here or better than this woman over here.

Comparatively, they're a decent citizen. They're a good person. And so they'll be acceptable in God's sight because of those things. And yet, the Bible is clear. No one will be justified by God, by the law.

No one. It's impossible. It cannot be done. But that's how we would seek to be justified. That's how we would seek to be right in His sight. The Bible says, no, it's not going to work that way.

Or, or we just, we just assume that God will let bygones be bygones. That He's a loving God and so He would have, of course, He would not want to punish sin.

Of course, He wants to forgive us and let things go. The Bible says, no, God has to uphold His own righteousness. He has to remain holy. And so what does He do? He sends His own Son to be a wrath bearer, to be a propitiation, so that He might display and uphold His righteousness.

[22 : 45] The plan of God for our salvation is not what we would imagine. And the world has imagined a lot of things. imagines those things because the world is blind to spiritual realities, just as Peter is blind to the things of God here.

So spiritual blindness will at times keep us from understanding who Christ is. It will keep us from understanding what Christ has accomplished for us on the cross. And then lastly, I think this text would have us see that our spiritual blindness can many times keep us from fully trusting and treasuring who Christ is and what He's done for us on the cross.

Let me say that again. Spiritual blindness will keep us from fully trusting in who Christ is and what He has done for us on the cross and treasuring Him for all of who He is.

Take a look at the end of chapter 8. It says, Jesus calls the crowd to Him and His disciples and He said to them, If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.

For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the Gospels will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?

[24 : 04] For what can a man give in return for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.

If anyone would come after Me, if anyone wants to be My follower, these are the things you must do. Deny yourself, take up your cross, lose your life, give up the world.

This is not a formula for how to become a super Christian. That's not what this is. In fact, Allie and I were having a discussion the other day about the difference between the Roman Catholic view of saints and the biblical view of who the saints are.

And there's a passage in Hebrews that talks about a cloud of witnesses that watches, that sees, that talks about those believers who have passed before us.

And the Roman Catholic interpretation is that those are the saints, those are the super holy people who have gone before us and they watch over us. And therefore, we pray to them.

[25 : 16] We're to pray to them is what the Roman Catholic Church teaches. And that whole business is based upon a statement from Paul's writings in which Paul talks about us having the fellowship of the saints.

And since in Roman Catholic theologies, the saints are super Christians. The saints are those who have done incredible things and therefore, after their death, the church has elevated them to the position of saint.

And the Bible says you have the fellowship of the saints. Therefore, the fellowship of the saints must mean that you somehow commune with dead people, dead super Christians. And yet in the Bible, saints are all Christians.

There's no distinction between the really, really obedient and those who are just somewhat obedient. There's no distinction between, well, those who believe and then those who really believe. There is no distinction between the two. You either are or you are not. You either do these things. You either deny yourself and take up your cross and lay down your life and give up the world or you don't follow Him.

[26 : 19] There's no in between. There's no middle ground there. Now those things happen progressively in our lives. We grow in our ability to wean ourselves off of the world and its false pleasures.

That's true. But the commitment of a disciple is to treasure Christ above all else. And if that means laying down our lives, then it means laying down our lives. But those who are spiritually blind, even though they may have received enough sight, they may have enough understanding to correctly identify who Christ is.

They may even have enough spiritual knowledge. They may have been in church often enough that they can correctly tell you why Christ died on the cross. Yet when it comes to this point, they do not treasure Him enough.

They do not trust in Him enough. They don't really believe. They know these things in their mind.

They get them right on a test.

But when it comes down to it, they don't trust in Him. They don't trust in His cross. And they will not lay down their lives and all that they have for Him.

[27 : 29] And that's what real faith is. That's what real faith does. Let me share with you quickly a quotation I came across this week from Charles Spurgeon.

A lot of you are familiar with Charles Spurgeon. He was a pastor in London in the 1800s. He's called the Prince of Preachers, one of the greatest preachers to have ever lived. And I want you to hear what he says.

He says, What is more remarkable still, a man may have much scriptural knowledge. He may understand in the letter the things of the kingdom of God.

He may be very orthodox in his beliefs and he may be able to give an answer to those who ask him what he believes and why he believes. But still, he may have no spiritual perception of the reality of these things.

A person may know something of botany from books and he may even understand the Linnaean system of classifying plants, but he may never after all have seen the primrose by the river's brim nor have gathered a single flower out of the garden.

[28 : 36] He is a poor botanist, is he not? He who has studied natural history in his own chamber but has never seen a living animal knows very little about the subject after all.

We may have round about us those who can talk of heaven and hell and sin and salvation and Christ and the Holy Spirit who nevertheless have never had one true perception of the meaning of any of these words.

They see but perceive not. They hear but do not understand. They are unbelievers and the God of this world has blinded their minds.

That's a danger that we all have to face. We all have to ask ourselves do we have real spiritual sight? And yes, you begin by saying have I understood the scriptures correctly?

Do I know who Jesus is? Do I understand the cross and why he died upon the cross? That's sort of Christianity 101. That's basic Christian doctrine. You have to get that right but then you have to move a step behind getting that right and ask yourself will I lay down my life for it?

[29 : 44] Do I just see Christ as knowledge that I've gained from reading a book or going to a class or do I see him as a treasure that I would give up everything to have in my grasp?

We are we are all afflicted with blindness. We are born as Paul says as children of wrath. We all come into this world with the same amount of sight.

Zero. And the test of whether or not we can truly see Christ for who he is doesn't stop at answering the questions correctly.

The test of whether or not we see Christ and we perceive him and we know him for who he is in our hearts is whether or not we love what we see. If you just read about things if you just hear about things from others and you don't really see them you'll never love them.

and Jesus says if you would follow after me deny yourself take up your cross lay down your life and set aside the world then you've seen me then you've beheld me and then you can be my follower.

[31 : 01] Let's pray. Let's pray.