

“Causing the Blind to See”

Mark 8:1-38

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### **Opening Prayer**

Scripture is given to us for the express purpose of helping us to see. Blindness, spiritual blindness, keeps one from knowing their Creator. Jesus’s words and His work, especially His work upon the cross, free us from spiritual darkness Beloved. Jesus’ purpose in coming was always to heal the sick, free the captives, and help the blind to see. All of those are in reference to what He did/does spiritually... bring us from eternal death to eternal life through His sacrifice. He came to make is so that the blind could see.

Our reading for today began with a familiar sounding parable. Jesus feeds another crowd, this time four thousand (plus many women and children) in the wilderness. Out of seven small loaves and a few small fish, He again creates a surplus of food miraculously. After this miracle, the disciples and Jesus get into a boat and sail to Dalmanutha. While there, the Pharisees try to test Jesus into doing a miraculous sign. The only response Jesus gives is that they are a sinful generation, and the only sign they will receive is that of Jonah. (A reference to the three days Jesus will be in the ground, the same number of days Jonah was in the fish.) After leaving the Pharisees, the disciples realize that they had brought no bread for the journey. Jesus warns them to beware of the “leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.” When they think Jesus is scolding them about bread, Jesus reveals to the disciples that they are still in the dark. “Do you not see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear?...” He quotes from two different places in the Old Testament, from Jeremiah 5 and Ezekiel 12, where the Israelites didn’t acknowledge what God was clearly doing. He then plainly reminds them ““When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets of broken pieces did you pick up?’ And they said to Him, ‘Twelve.’ ‘When I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?’ They said to Him, ‘Seven.’ And He was saying to them, ‘Do you not yet understand?’”

Beloved, power is never the issue for Christ. He has the ability to do whatever He pleases, for He is God in human flesh. The concern about bread from the disciples was foolish, for He had already demonstrated several times that He could create as much as He pleased. What He was warning them of in His comments on the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod, was to be aware of their false teachings. This entire conversation reveals to the disciples that which Jesus was well aware of, that the disciples didn't fully understand. They were still in the dark on many things. This will be shown even more so with Peter's comments at the end of the chapter, and then especially with His own comments on what is important. In the middle, there is the physical miracle that shows how Christ is at work within His disciples... and us... to give spiritual sight to the blind.

It should be understood that everything in scripture exists where it does, how it does, for a reason. In fact, it exists how it does, where it does, for many reasons. It makes sense to think of the Bible through this lens considering it is God Himself who authors it. I bring that up, because here in Mark 8 (and even into Mark 9 which we will look at later), there is this revelation that happens. The disciples are slow and dull when it comes to Jesus's work at the beginning of the chapter, not even recognizing that He is infinitely greater than any lack of bread they might have. Then, Jesus goes and opens a blind man's eyes, in two stages. After that, Peter proclaims who Jesus really is, although he still stumbles after. After that, Jesus reveals Himself even more through His words about the worth of heaven, and finally after that Jesus reveals Himself to be God through the Transfiguration in chapter nine. If that was hard to follow, just remember this: Jesus is always revealing more of who He is here.

Going back to the account, in verse 22 Jesus and His disciples arrive in the town of Bethsaida. There the people bring Jesus this blind man, and they expect Him to do what He has done everywhere else. They expect Jesus to touch him, and thus for him to be healed. However, Jesus does something a little bit different than His usual healings. He takes the man by the hand outside the village, and spits on his eyes, then lays His hands upon the man's eyes. When Jesus asks the man what he sees, the man replies that he sees people looking like trees walking around. I am no optometrist, but I am very confident in stating that this man's sight was not yet fully healed. But after Jesus lays His hands upon the man a second time, then the blind man sees everything clearly, with his vision fully restored. There is a question I want to raise in that miracle: why did it take two touches to make the

man's sight restored? What is the symbolism there? Beloved, there are a few lessons we can perhaps learn.

The first is that of the larger story. Jesus is revealing Himself to the disciples and to everyone around Him, but they don't see everything just yet. He has revealed that He is God in human flesh, but they don't see clearly right away. That won't happen until He raises from the dead. Perhaps this is part of the background of the account. Secondly, this almost certainly also relates to the Jews. They had been given the Law and the Prophets in the Old Testament, but they still didn't clearly see the full picture of God's plans for spiritual salvation. That wouldn't come until Jesus, specifically again with His death and resurrection. For us, we can also take some notes out of this for our own lives. We don't always see God's plans clear as day, certainly not at first. It is easy to talk about how the Lord worked in your life in the past, but when it was the present it was a much more difficult task to continue in faith. Spiritually, there was probably a time where you were blind to the truth, then you had it revealed to you over time. Even if you want to think about how the Lord is growing you and molding you and shaping you over many years, you can see a connection to Jesus healing a blind man in stages. Whatever the reasons, Jesus does heal the man of his blindness and sends him away. Jesus will then go with His disciples on a journey to Caesarea Philippi, and on the way He will heal some of their spiritual blindness.

“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?’” If you remember, a couple chapters ago the people of the region started to make guesses about who Jesus was. The answers the disciples give at first are correct. The people are guessing that Jesus must be a resurrected great prophet. Perhaps He is John the Baptist, or perhaps He is Elijah, or perhaps He is another great prophet of old brought back by God. Then Jesus changes the question. “But who do you say that I am?” Peter has the answer. “You are the Christ.” After all of the spiritual blindness that the disciples have shown, Peter now has been revealed the answer. In Matthew's account of Peter's confession, he writes what Jesus's response to Peter's correct answer is. “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.” As was the case with the blind man, the Lord has removed the blindness. But was also the case with the blind man, Peter still doesn't get it perfectly right

just yet, for immediately after this Jesus starts telling the disciples plainly that He will have to die for the sins of man.

“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.’” Perhaps you can, like me, identify a bit here with Peter. It is easy to get things screwed up sometimes isn’t it? To get it right one moment, and the very next to find yourself caring more for the things of man than the things of God. Peter couldn’t understand how the Messiah, the Christ, could die for the sins of mankind. Part of it is because it hadn’t been revealed fully to him yet, part of it was because he (like all of us) was a sinner who couldn’t grasp God’s perfect plans fully. Peter at this point was like the blind man when he was only partially healed. He knew Jesus was the Christ, but he didn’t see the full picture. Peter and the disciples, if you want further context, were expecting Jesus’s kingdom to be an earthly one. They were going to be Jesus’s right-hand men. Completely missing the point that Jesus was going to rise again, Peter and the other fixated on how Jesus was telling them that He was going to die. It wasn’t until He rose from the dead that the veil was fully taken off. It wasn’t until His plans were revealed that they would fully understand.

The end of chapter eight is a small section of verses where Jesus teaches the crowds once more. The words He speaks give insight to any who would listen, to value God’s work and heaven’s glory over anything the world would have to offer. To fit with the blindness and the seeing theme, the one who sees clearly spiritually will value eternity, while the foolish and blind man will settle for that which is only temporary in the world. “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.” This is before Jesus is crucified, but the implication is the same. It will cost a person everything to follow Jesus. “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.” Beloved, taking the veil off, removing

any blinders, Jesus is plainly telling everyone that if they wish to follow Him then they have to do so fully. If anything in this world is valued more than the Lord, whether that be riches or one's identity or hobbies or luxuries... then they will miss out on that which is eternal. If anyone is ashamed to follow Christ, then they are still blind and groping in the dark.

Beloved, in ending today's message, I pray we would take off the blinders and see how the Lord is at work and see what He has already done. If you call Christ your Lord, then well done. If Jesus is your Lord and Savior, if your life is His, then you are freed of sin and death. You have been freed of your spiritual blindness. God's full mercy has been given to us through what Christ did on the cross. He fully revealed Himself to be Lord, to be the Messiah. Mercifully and graciously and lovingly, you and I have been invited into His kingdom. You are no fool to leave behind the things of this world, to lay everything down to pick up that cross and follow Him. Following Jesus is worth everything. Your pride, your identity in the world, your hobbies, your wealth, even your earthly life all pale in comparison to what He has given opened for you. Eternal life, Beloved, is for any and all who would receive it from His hand. Confess Him, and don't be ashamed. For if you do so, then you are not spiritually blind anymore... rather you now see clearly. Let us pray.

**Closing Prayer**