

## Jason Upchurch - Mark 8:22-33 - The Good News Is Revealed By God

This morning we really come to a spectacular section of Mark's gospel where Jesus uses a very unusual miracle to drive home a very important spiritual truth.

So here's the big takeaway: Only God can cure spiritual blindness.

That's really what this section is about. The miracle of Jesus healing the blind man was true and happened. But Mark wants us to understand that it happened not just to bless this poor blind guy, but to illustrate the bigger issue of spiritual blindness and the reality that God has to be the one to heal it.

Spiritual blindness is really humanity's biggest problem. We could say people are lost or in sin or condemned. Those are all true as well because it's really just different ways of talking about the same issue. Here the way the spiritual problem is pictured is blindness.

What is spiritual blindness? It is the inability to truly know and love the things of God.

That definition is important. I use that word "inability" specifically because in order to overcome spiritual blindness God has to work. No one can cure their own spiritual blindness. No one can cure their own spiritual deadness. Just like this blind man - the only hope of sight is through the work of God.

**1 Cor. 2:14:** The natural person - the unbeliever - does not accept the things of the Spirit of God for they are folly to him and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

The things of God - the gospel message and the amazing truths about Jesus - can only be known and loved if the Spirit of God works in us.

Can people know the message of the gospel without being saved? Sure. But they will know the gospel as foolishness. Not as wisdom.

Only through God's work can someone know and love the gospel.

**2 Cor. 4:4** says that the god of this world - Satan - has blinded the minds of unbelievers.

Unbelievers are his children and he has blinded them.

**1 John 2:11** whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

And of course Jesus over and over rebukes the Pharisees as being blind guides; and even says they are the blind leading the what? Blind.

The reality of spiritual blindness isn't just a NT concept, we see it all over the OT as well. It's usually used in the context of judgement on people who are leaders. People who should know better but they are deceived.

Messiah is also promised in terms of opening eyes:

**Psalms 146:8:** The Lord opens the eyes of the blind...

And Messiah's coming was going to be marked by this specific healing:

**Isaiah 35:5:** Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped.

**Isaiah 42:7:** To open the eyes of the blind, to bring the prisoners out of the dungeon...lead the blind in a way they do not know...(42:16).

So spiritual blindness is a continual theme in the Bible for those who do not know or love the things of God. And it's only God who can cure it.

Now how do we know that this section isn't just about a blind man, but that it's also talking about spiritual blindness?

Well, notice how this section unfolds. Jesus and the disciples are coming back across on the boat. The disciples are concerned they don't have any bread, Jesus tries to spark some spiritual conversation and says you need to really be concerned about leaven - the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod. He's saying be on guard for hypocrisy and sexual sin. They don't get it. They're like "Jesus, we don't have any bread, that's the problem." Jesus says this. **Read 17-18**

The disciples have eyes - eyeballs - but they aren't seeing anything. They're there with Jesus and they just don't see what he's doing or about.

Then we have this weird healing. Where it almost seems as though Jesus fails to heal the blind man. He heals him, he can see, but it's really fuzzy. Then Jesus has to lay his hands on him again and now he can see clearly.

What's that about? What Jesus is illustrating is that physical blindness, like spiritual blindness, can only be healed by God. And he's also illustrating that even once your eyes are open, it's God who has to give you greater clarity.

Because notice the next story. Jesus takes the disciples with him to Caesarea Philippi way up in the north. And it's here that Jesus questions the disciples: who do you say that I am? And after all the blunders, all the misunderstandings, Peter finally gets it right: you are the Christ!

Boom. Eyes are open. Matthew's gospel even adds "Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father in heaven" just in case we miss the connection. God has opened Peter's eyes to finally see - finally understand - that Jesus is the Christ.

Then Jesus says he's going to die and rise again. That's good, except that Peter rebukes Jesus. That's a fail.

So what's happening is that the blind man's healing is also acting as an illustration of Peter's conversion. Peter's eyes are open, but the picture isn't clear for him. At least not yet.

And the picture won't become clear to Peter in Mark's gospel. In **9:32** Jesus again tells them about his death and resurrection and again they don't understand. And Mark even adds that they were afraid to ask him about it. Peter already had been rebuked, they're not going to try again.

When do the disciples truly understand? I think they truly understand on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit is poured out on them and the whole of the gospel message is made clear to them.

So that's a long introduction, but I think it's helpful to understand what Mark is doing here.

Now, let's dive into the passage.

### 1) Healing physical blindness. Read 22-26

This healing is unique to Mark's gospel. None of the other gospels record this particular healing. And it is easily one of the most unusual of Jesus's healings that we have recorded in the Bible. It is unusual because on first glance it seems like Jesus doesn't quite heal the guy. It's almost as if he has to take 2 tries to get it right.

What's up with that? Well, I think what's up with that is, again, that Jesus is using this healing of blindness as an illustration of spiritual blindness. Jesus is God. He could have healed him in one simple shot. He could have healed him from far away. He could have made it so the man was never blind in the first place. But he does this in this order on purpose.

Actually, many people surmise that what Jesus is doing here - on a physical level - is actually 2 miracles. Miracle 1 is Jesus reattaches the ocular nerves that connect the eye to the brain. The man was completely blind and miracle 1 reconnected that.

Miracle 2 was to correct the man's vision. It seems as though glasses or contacts would have cleared some things up after the first miracle. He can see movement, light and probably color. But it's all fuzzy to him. And so Jesus miraculously corrects his vision as well.

It's 2 separate miracles that Jesus performs on this man. So while it may seem odd, it's actually illustrating a spiritual point, and demonstrating more of Jesus's divine power not less.

Another odd part here is that Jesus spits in the guy's face. That's odd, to say the least. Jesus usually just lays his hands on someone to heal them. He also can heal from far off distances. Jesus will heal blind Bartimaeus at the end of chapter 10 and he doesn't spit in his face. He just heals him and sends him on his way. Why spit here?

The answer is we don't know. In the ancient world some people viewed saliva as having healing powers. Blind people are recorded as approaching emperors of Rome asking for them to spit on them to heal the blindness. No word on whether it worked. And many people - especially Rabbis - thought the idea was ridiculous.

Jesus uses saliva in 3 of his healings. The first, we saw last chapter when Jesus healed the deaf and mute man. He spit and then touched the man's tongue and the man could speak clearly.

The other time is when he heals the man born blind in **John 9**. Turn over there. I want to show you this passage because not only does Jesus use spit to heal a blind man, but John does the same thing as Mark in recording this idea of physical blindness and spiritual blindness.

And I thought about just summarizing this because it's a little bit of a longer section. But it's such a humorous passage and seals the point I actually want to read it together. This is in Jerusalem. **Read 1-7**

So he's in Jerusalem, sees this blind man. He's not blind because of his sin, but so that God can bring glory to himself - God is sovereign over this guy's ailment. Jesus makes a mud/spit concoction and spreads it on the man's eyes. And then, while the guy is still blind, tells him to go walk through the crowded city and find the pool on the south end to wash up. **Read 8-17**

This guy who has exactly zero theological training is schooling these religious leaders in obvious truths. **Read 18-41**

So the blind man - and it's interesting that even though he's been healed he is still called the blind man - the blind man sees physically and he sees spiritually. The Pharisees see physically, but are blind spiritually.

And the more they claim to know spiritually, the more they are condemned.

**Back in Mark 8**, the healing here is of a different guy. But the principles are similar. Only God can open eyes - physical and spiritual. And sometimes even once our eyes are open, things need to be clarified.

One other note here is that Jesus brought this man out of the city and healed him away from the city. Then once the man is healed he tells the man to not go back into the city.

In previous healings he's told the people to not tell who healed them. This was to keep people from going bonkers over Jesus's healing powers. He didn't want people to take him by force and make him king. But the more he healed, the more people told.

Here tells the man to not even enter the city. He doesn't even want the man to have an opportunity to tell other people. We aren't told if the man obeyed or not.

## 2) Healing Spiritual Blindness. **Read 27-30**

This is where we see the proverbial eyes of Peter open. The disciples have been confused about Jesus. They're often portrayed as being more spiritually dense than even unbelieving Gentiles and at least as blind as the Pharisees. But here, we have the magnificent confession of Peter that Jesus is the Christ.

Remember, they had been in Bethsaida, a city at about 1 o'clock on the lake. But they head north to Caesarea Philippi - way far north in Israel This is a city is jointly named after Caesar and Herod Phillip. This is the same Phillip who's wife left him to marry Herod Antipas.

And the city itself at this time was absolutely pagan. It was literally a smorgasbord of paganism. There was a temple to Augustus, a temple to the god Pan, Zeus, one to spiritual nymphs, god Nemesis, the Tomb of the Temple of the Sacred Goats.

Behind the Temple of Augustus was a cave where water came out and the cave is called the Gates of Hell. The reason is because above the cave it looks as though the cave is on fire because of the red rock above it, hence the gates of hell. The pagans would actually sacrifice babies in this watery cave by drowning them to the gods.

You guys know that I'm not much on weird spiritual warfare stuff, but when we visited this site in Israel it just felt demonic. It was weird and eerie. I have never been to a place that felt dead and demonic like that place and most of the ruins are gone. But it's weird.

That's where they are at. Jesus takes them to the heart of pantheistic paganism in Israel surrounded by all these pagan temples to all these false and has a little unveiling ceremony.

"We're here among all these gods...who do people say that I am? Am I just another idol on the shelf? What's the word on the street?" It's clear that Jesus is someone important. He's healing and teaching and opening the eyes of the blind. He's got to be someone amazing. So people say big time Bible characters: John the Baptist, Elijah, a prophet of some kind.

"But who do you confess that I am?" In the original this is very emphatic. He says "You - you guys - who do you say that I am?" That's what the world says, who do you say?

By the way this is the most important question that anyone can ever ask. Who do you say Jesus is? And - specifically - who do you say he is when you're surrounded by a bunch of unbelieving pagans? What are you going to say? What we really believe about Jesus is what we would say when it matters the most.

Peter finally gets it right: You are the Christ! You are the Messiah that we've all been waiting for. Everything that Abraham and Moses and the prophet's were all looking forward to; all the promises we've been given over the millennia. They are all about you, Jesus - the Christ!

The word Christ - christos- is a Greek word meaning anointed one. It's Jesus's title, not his last name. The NT was written in Greek, the OT in Hebrew. The Hebrew word for anointed one is Messiah - meschiah. They mean the same thing. Messiah and Christ mean the same things, just in different languages.

In the OT when God wanted to designate someone as his chosen person, he would have that person anointed with oil. The oil being poured on their head would signify God's choice of them for a task: king or prophet or high priest.

But there was an expectation throughout the OT - really beginning in **Genesis 3** where a son of Adam would crush the head of the serpent - that a supreme Messiah - supreme chosen one - would come and rescue Israel.

Before John the Baptist shows up on the scene Israel hadn't heard from God in 400 years. The silence was deafening and the oppression of the Jews was grueling. They had no sovereign country, they were essentially governed by pagan Rome after having been conquered by Babylon and Greece. They were helpless and longed for rescue.

So Messianic fervor was high. If you remember, many people thought John the Baptist was the Messiah even though he denied it. The people weren't just casually waiting; they were eagerly expecting.

There was also a thread - especially through Isaiah - that Messiah was divine. He would be God. We see this in the Psalms as well.

And so when Peter confesses this he is confessing the full weight of who Jesus is as the expected one. His eyes are opened.

Again, Matthew also records that Jesus says "flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but your Father in heaven." Peter didn't come up with this on his own. The Father had to reveal it to him.

Mark doesn't need to say that because Mark has framed Peter's confession with the story of the blind man.

This, by the way, is the confession everyone must make to enter heaven. If you want to have your sins forgiven, if you want eternal life with Jesus forever, the Bible calls us to confess Jesus as Messiah. Confess Jesus as the Christ.

We have to make the same confession as Peter. If you read through the little book of **1 John** that's why this is such a huge deal. Confessing Jesus as the Christ.

**1 John 3:23:** And this is the commandment: that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ - Jesus Messiah - and love one another just as he has commanded us.

**1 John 5:1:** Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.

John also says in **1 John 2:22:** Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?

Jesus is the divine Messiah that we must believe if we are to be saved.

**Romans 10:9-10:** If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

This is not simply a verbal confession like saying "Hocus Pocus" or something. The only confession, the only faith, that will save a person is a fully committed, fully convinced belief in the death and resurrection of Messiah Jesus for your sins.

When someone believes in Jesus their eyes are opened, and their sins are forgiven. By the way, you can do that right here, right now. You don't need to pray a prayer, you don't need to come forward or talk to anyone. You just need to believe. And the way you tell people you have believe that Jesus is your Lord, your Messiah, is through baptism.

Proclaiming your new faith for all to see by reenacting the death and resurrection of the Lord who saved you.

So Peter's eyes are opened. But he doesn't see clearly just yet.

We've seen the physical healing as a real life parable. We see the spiritual healing as Peter's eyes are opened.

**3) But Peter's eyes are still fuzzy. Read 31-33**

Swing and a miss. How does Peter go from the height of understanding who Jesus is to being rebuked publicly by Jesus and being called Satan?

I mean, that's pretty harsh. But Peter has also committed a huge blunder.

Peter sees that Jesus is the Christ. But he doesn't understand it all just yet. And what he doesn't understand is that Messiah was destined to die. He would die at the hands of the religious leaders.

Everyone thought Messiah would rule the nations. That all nations would bow down before him and the nations would stream to Israel again.

Well, that's true. But not in the way anyone thought. It's pretty clear - especially in **Isa 53** that Messiah would suffer for the sins of the people. Jesus says he will die and 3 days later he would rise. The resurrection of Messiah was also clear in the OT.

David says **Psalms 16:10** You will not abandon my soul to Sheol or let your holy one see corruption.

Well, David died. And his body turned to dust in the grave. So he wasn't talking about himself. No, he was talking about Jesus. Who's body died but wasn't in the grave long enough to even begin to deteriorate.

Jesus is telling them this plainly and they can't even begin to wrap their mind around this. It's too fuzzy for them. That can't be what Messiah does!?

And so Peter rebukes Jesus. The irony of that sentence, by the way, is just amazing. Rebuke Jesus. Really?

And Jesus sets the whole crew straight: to deny that Messiah dies and rises is satanic. It is setting your mind on the things of man, not of God.

Let me ask you something: were there things earlier in your salvation you believed or did that you now cringe at just a little? You were saved, but you were dumb in the faith.

You guys this is how we all are. When we're saved, our eyes are opened but things are not clear. It takes a lifetime of study and life to bring spiritual things into clarity. It takes a lifetime of immersing ourselves in the Word to get some clarity on God.

I don't know how many things I've changed my mind on over the years. Age of the earth, sons of God in Genesis 6, predestination, evangelism, head coverings, eschatology, our place in politics, church membership, church government, missions, the Lord's Supper, on and on.

I was saved at 14 and I look back on my 14 year old self and really the only thing I knew was God loved me and Jesus died for me. I don't even think I had a solid understanding of the Trinity or repentance at that point. But I knew God loved me and showed that by sending Jesus to die and rise for my justification.

I just want to encourage you: you need to be growing in your faith. If you look back over the last few years and you haven't been challenged or you haven't had anything clarified as you follow God. It might be 1) because you've grown lazy in your pursuit of God. You see, there's color and movement, and that's good enough for you. I want to encourage you that that's not good enough for you. You should be gaining a clearer picture of God as you walk with him.

The second reason is that maybe your spiritual eyes aren't open at all. And by that I mean you are not a believer.

See, even someone who has never been to a beach or seen a beach can describe it in vivid detail if they've heard about it enough. The smell, the sunsets, feel of sand on their feet. The cold, salty water. Blind people in the middle of Sahara Africa can describe a beach they've never been to.

In the same way, spiritually blind people are often very religious. They know the words, they know the phrases. They know what they should say and do even if they actually have no sight at all.

I just want to encourage you this morning to make sure your spiritual eyes are really opened. That Jesus is your Messiah and Lord. And that your not languishing in fuzziness, but growing in clarity. **Pray**