

# Till It's Clear

Mark 8:22-26

*Halifax: 29 December 2019*

## **Introduction:**

Today we are returning to our sermon series in Mark.

- We have come to Mark 8:22-26 where we have a very unusual miracle.
- It is unlike any other that we have in Bible, not because it is necessarily more impressive than any other miracle... Jesus does heal a blind man, which is indeed right up there with making the lame walk, the deaf hear, and the dead arise...
  - but it is unlike any other because of the unusual way in which Jesus performs it—the unique way that He carries out the work of giving sight to this man.

Listen as I read to you the record of this miracle that is given to us in God's Word.

- I will begin reading in Mark 8:22 and read to verse 26.
  - Give careful attention because this is the holy and infallible word of God:

**Mark 8:22-26: Then He came to Bethsaida; and they brought a blind man to Him, and begged Him to touch him. 23 So He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the town. And when He had spit on his eyes and put His hands on him, He asked him if he saw anything. 24 And he**

**looked up and said, "I see men like trees, walking." 25 Then He put His hands on his eyes again and made him look up. And he was restored and saw everyone clearly. 26 Then He sent him away to his house, saying, "Neither go into the town, nor tell anyone in the town."**

May the LORD bless the reading of His holy word.

## **I. What is it about this miracle? Let's begin by looking at what Jesus does here.**

A. Jesus goes to great lengths to heal this man.

- The blind man's friends bring him to Jesus, and Jesus seems to give him a lot of extra attention.
  1. Notice how He takes him aside—
    - He doesn't just step away from the crowd, but He actually takes him by the hand and leads him out of town.
    - This is quite the thing—usually Jesus just heals people right on the spot.
      - Recently we saw Him take the deaf man aside from the crowd, but here He takes this man out of town, giving him focused attention.
  2. And then He makes use of means.
    - The men that brought the blind men knew that Jesus usually just touched people—or let them touch Him; and that is what they actually asked Jesus to do.
      - But this time, Jesus spits in the man's eyes and puts His hands on him.
      - He did do something like that that with the deaf man that had the speech impediment—He spat on his finger and put the spittle on the man's tongue, and He put His fingers in his ears...
        - perhaps in part because the man could not hear, but it was unusual.
          - Usually Jesus just touches or speaks and people and are healed.

3. But then we have the most unusual thing of all...
  - It is so unusual that I want to read it to you again:
    - a. Starting at the end of verse 23, it says: **He asked him if he saw anything.**
      - When has Jesus ever done that?
      - Normally, He simply declares that the person is healed, or we are told that he is...
        - This is the only time that He asked the person being healed if he is healed—in this case, how well he is able to see.
        - Jesus appears to already know that the healing is incomplete.
    - b. And even more remarkable... this is the only time that the person Jesus is healing is not completely healed...
      - Look at the man's answer in verse 24: **And he looked up and said, "I see men like trees, walking."**
        - In other words, he could see, but he could not see clearly enough to distinguish people from trees except that the people were walking.
        - Many commentators think the man must have been able to see in the past since he seemed to know what to expect. That seems reasonable enough.
        - But the odd thing is that his healing is far from complete—
          - It is remarkable that he can see at all, but there is still more healing that needs to be done to complete the miracle.
    - c. And since this does not happen anywhere else with Jesus, Jesus also does something else that He never does anywhere else.
      - He touches the man's eyes again... verse 25: **Then He put His hands on his eyes again and made him look up. And he was restored and saw everyone clearly.**
      - Now with this second touch, the man is able to see clearly—the word used here is a rare word (τηλαυγῶς) that means *to see clearly from afar*.
        - There is no doubt now of the full extent of the cure.

➤ But what is going on here with this double touch business?

B. This is capable of gross misunderstanding.

1. Someone could see this and conclude that Jesus *tried* to heal him and did not succeed, so He gave it a second shot.
  - Someone might suggest that the man did not have sufficient faith—and that might be true enough—but that never hindered Jesus at any other time, once He set out to heal someone.
    - It kept people from coming to Him to be healed, but on no other occasion do we have Jesus touching someone to heal them or speaking a word to do so without a perfect result—the bad hand is made as whole as the other.
  - So what is going on?
    - Was He unable to heal him for some reason?

2. Of course not.
  - Just because He does not heal him the first time He touches him does not mean that He is unable to do so.
    - It would be unreasonable to think that when Jesus did so many other miracles and never struggled in the least to bring about the cure.
  - It would be different if Jesus had commanded His eyes to be opened or if He had declared the man to be healed when he wasn't.
    - We never have Him say, "Receive your sight," or "Rise up and walk," and have the patient declare that they are not able to do so.
  - But there is no command like that.
    - Jesus simply spits and touches the man's eyes and then asks him if he can see, and receives the reply that he can, but not very clearly.
      - Then He touches him again and the man can see clearly.
      - We have every reason to think that this was exactly what Jesus intended to do.

C. Knowing what we know about Jesus, we must conclude that He takes this two-stage process for some other reason besides inability.

1. Remember that Jesus' physical miracles serve as signs of His spiritual (invisible) work that He does in us as sinners.
  - For example, when He fed the five thousand, He then declares that He is the bread of life who came down from heaven to give life to the world.
    - Cleansing lepers shows how He can cleanse us from sin and defilement.
    - Opening the ears of the deaf shows how He can give sinners the ability to receive and understand God's word.
    - Giving sight to the blind shows that He is able give us spiritual perception.
  - Here we have (as with other miracles) a picture of how Jesus can give sight to those that are spiritually blind.

➤ But He is also giving us an additional picture with this more drawn out two-step process that uses means.
2. Surely He is showing us that despite the concentrated and focused use of means,
  - deliverance from spiritual blindness takes repeated touches from Jesus.
  - Sinners are delivered from spiritual blindness in stages so that we see dimly at first and then more clearly when more work is done.
3. The timing of this healing makes it clear that this is the intent.
  - Mark is a master at arranging his material in a way that shows the correlation between one event and another.
    - You will remember that Mark learned from Peter, so it Peter who was especially sensitive to these relationships.
  - He saw in this two-staged opening of this man's blind eyes the multi-staged opening of his own spiritual eyes and that of his fellow disciples.
    - The timing of this unique miracle was just after Jesus exposed the spiritual blindness of His disciples and just before their confession that Jesus is the Christ that follows.

TRANS> That brings us to the next point...

**II. This blind man represents the twelve apostles in their spiritual blindness at this time despite all the special attention that they had received from Jesus.**

A. Jesus' disciples were surely feeling the sting of the scathing rebuke that they had just received from Him about their blindness.

- You know how you feel when someone over you—especially Jesus—has just put you in your place—
  - when they have just shown you how stupid and how stubborn you have been, and how you should be much farther along—and you know it is true.
  - Let me remind you what had just happened.
- 1. Jesus, having just been coldly received by the Pharisees at Dalmanutha in Galilee, warned His disciples to beware of what He called the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod (see Mark 8:15).
  - If you remember, as soon as Jesus got to Dalmanutha, He was confronted by a band of Pharisees who demanded from Him a sign from heaven (8:10-11).
    - He had done probably thousands of signs in Galilee—and these were God's people who had prophecies that told them what those signs would be... healing the sick, causing the blind to see and the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak...
  - And these spiritual leaders have the audacity to ask Him for a sign as if they were lacking evidence.
    - I explained to you that a lack of signs is never the real problem. Those who have signs are often no better off.
      - Hard hearts are the problem.
      - The problem is not a lack of evidence but that we don't like what we see about God. That is the root of unbelief.
  - Look at people today who deny or doubt the existence of God.
    - The whole creation testifies plainly to His eternal power and divine nature.
    - They have no other plausible explanation for the existence of the world, but they cling on desperately to the notion of self-creation... that life just formed itself! Or that aliens planted life here.
    - They miss the obvious as if they don't have enough evidence for God.
  - So the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod was their continued skepticism about Jesus when they had more than enough evidence to show them that He was the Messiah.
    - Jesus told His disciples to beware of this leaven of the Pharisees.
    - He warned them because He saw that His disciples, who at first introduced Him to each other as the Messiah, were now starting to question if He really was.
      - Not because of a lack of evidence, but because they did not like the way He was doing things.

- When was He going to step forward as a king and lead them to take dominion in the world?
  - When were they going to get to move into a palace and sit on thrones with Him to rule over the world?
    - Was He really the Messiah?
  - Jesus, saddened by the response of the Pharisees and seeing the weakness of His disciples warned them to beware of this leaven.
2. And do you remember how His disciples responded?
- They were so blind that they thought He must be talking to them about bread—actual physical bread.
    - All this time that they had been with Jesus and heard Him speak about spiritual things, yet they thought He must have been talking about the fact that they had forgotten to bring bread with them in the boat.
  - On this day, Jesus was deeply grieved by the response of the Pharisees and their hardness...
    - But His disciples were thinking about bread—and probably thought He was telling them not to buy bread from these who had opposed Jesus or something.
    - They missed the point that He was warning them about the leaven of unbelief and skepticism because it was not on their minds... and they were the ones Jesus was grooming to be His representatives in the world!
3. In response to this spiritual blindness, Jesus lashed into them with one of the strongest rebukes He ever gave them.
- Do you remember? He blasted them with a barrage of questions, asking them how it could be that they do not understand or believe.
    - Look at verses 17-18: **But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, “Why do you reason because you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened? <sup>18</sup> Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember?”**
  - With these questions, He put them in the same category as the unbelieving multitudes of whom He had previously used the words of Isaiah that seeing they did not see and hearing they did not hear...
    - Only, His disciples were worse because they had been with Jesus all this time and did not see or hear, even though they had seen His miracles and heard His clear teaching in private sessions.
    - After pointing out that they had seen the feeding of the five thousand and the feeding of the four thousand,
      - He then asks them the last question in verse 21, “How is it that you don’t understand?”
      - How could they be so blind after all the time that He had spent with them, teaching them and showing them who He was?
- This scathing rebuke was just what His disciples needed to wake them up to obvious—that Jesus was the Messiah.

- Without this rebuke, it is doubtful that they would have been able to confess that He was the Messiah as they will do in the next section in Mark... Mark 8:27-30 which we will plan to look at in the next sermon.
- B. But can you see how this blind man is just like Jesus' disciples?
- He perfectly represents them.
1. Jesus had given them special attention that He did not give to others.
    - a. He had taken them aside to enable them to see the truth just as He took this man aside to enable him to see with his eyes.
    - b. He had spent concentrated personal time with them just like He did with the blind man.
    - c. He had used special means to teach them and show them who He was (for example, they saw Him feed the five thousand and the four thousand) just as He used special means with His spittle to open this man's eyes.
  2. Yet for all this, they still could not see clearly.
    - They were still not sure about Jesus—He was special, He did great things—but was He really the Messiah?
      - Maybe He *could* do a sign from heaven or something.
    - How was it that they did not understand after all that they had seen?
      - How was it that the blind man could not see clearly when Jesus had spent more focused effort on him than He had on anybody else?
- C. And what about you?
1. Tell me, has Jesus given you special attention?
    - Has He given you the Holy Scriptures? Do you have a copy of it translated into your own language?
    - Do you have access to other Christian writings to help you?
    - Has He provided you with Biblical teaching from His word?
    - Are you in a society where you have lots of time, and opportunity to make use of these means?
    - Has He worked in you by His Spirit, enabling you to understand and change?
  2. Well tell me, have you made the progress in your understanding and your walk that you ought to have made by now?
    - Are you where you ought to be by now?
    - I love the way John Brown of Haddington looked at all his privileges.
      - He was a very brilliant man. As a lad, he was very poor and did not receive an education, but he saved up and bought himself a Greek and Hebrew Bible and then taught himself to read them by starting with the genealogies to learn the alphabets.
      - He became so proficient that he became an excellent minister who trained many students in theology and biblical languages.
        - Yet, he always lamented that he was not further along on account of all the grace that God had given to him.

- He was convinced that if anyone else had had all the privileges he had enjoyed, they would have been much further along.
- That is the right way to look at it!
3. You should not suppose that God should have done more for you.
- You should rather recognise that you should have done a lot more for Him with all that He has done for you.
  - We live in a day in which we have more privileges, yet we complain about how hard we have it and make excuses.
    - If you think that God has not done way more for you than you have responded to, you are doubly blind and in danger of apostasy.
    - We see Him rightly when we see Him as the God of abundant abounding grace.
  - The reason the blind man could not see until Jesus touched him the second time was not because Jesus had not done enough with the first touch.
    - What Jesus did was sufficient to give Him perfect vision.
    - The problem was with the man—but that, of course, is not the end of the story.

**III. The lesson with this twice-touched blind man is one of grace. It is that Jesus will keep on touching us until we are perfected.**

- A. He has to touch His disciples multiple times—and so He does.
1. Think of the different stages of His revelation to them.
    - a. First, they had the privilege of growing up in Israel with the teaching of the synagogue and the testimonies of all the ceremonies at the temple.
      - They saw, but they did not see clearly.
    - b. Then, they had the privilege of coming under the teaching of the prophet, John the Baptist, who pointed to Jesus as the Messiah so that they followed Him.
      - By this they saw much more, but still not so clearly.
    - c. Then, they had the privilege of being with Jesus as His own disciples who saw all His signs, saw His perfections, and had personal teaching from Him.
      - Yet, even after much of this, we see how Jesus had to rebuke them for their blindness after which their eyes are opened to confess Him as the Messiah (in Mark 8:27-30 coming up next).
      - But still they did not see so clearly. They needed another touch.
    - d. They had the privilege of even more intimate and focused attention from Jesus during which time He taught them again and again about the cross.
      - But once again He will rebuke them for their blindness even when the time comes for Him to go to the cross.
    - e. But He will touch them again when He rises from the dead, teaches them, and then pours out His Spirit.
      - Now they see more clearly than ever... but still not perfectly.

- f. The Holy Spirit gives them revelation so that they give us the infallible word and preach the gospel...
    - They grow, but soon Peter becomes muddled about the gospel and avoids eating with the Gentiles—until Paul rebukes him.
    - This is Christ’s way of touching him again to bring him to fuller maturity.
  - g. Paul himself testifies as he goes on growing in the Lord that he has not yet attained to all that Christ has for him.
    - In Philippians he says: **Php 3:12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.**
    - In Romans 7, he speaks of the struggle that he still has with sin and cries out to be delivered, thanking God that he will be delivered in Christ.
2. You can see that over and over again, they are found to see dimly...
- And then Christ touches them and they see clearly relative to what they saw before.
  - Soon, He touches them again and brings them to greater and greater spiritual understanding and faithfulness.
- B. Take heart, Christian, our gracious Saviour will keep on touching you until you are perfected.
1. The promise of scripture in Philippians 1:6 is this: **He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.**
    - Whenever He begins a true work of grace in any individual, He completes it.
    - Your confidence should not be in yourself, but in Christ who touches us again and again.
  2. Perhaps you can see that your growth has been slow and that you are not as mature as you ought to be—that you have squandered your privileges—that much of His work in you has been wasted.
    - The encouragement is that He will keep on with you, touching you again and again until you attain and truly know Him and love Him as you ought.
    - Turn your eyes to Him—the Christ who touches His people again.
  3. Can’t you see how good He has been to you?
    - Can’t you see how He has worked in you and how He continues to work?
    - Are there not times in your life where He has broken into your life when you are in the middle of a struggle and given you a fresh, clear vision of Himself?
      - That is always the hope I have for each one of you when you come into a struggle—that Christ will touch you again with His grace and lift you up.
    - Sometimes we are simply going along in our service to Him and He comes to us to touch us in a powerful way so that we see more clearly...
      - Sometimes the touch is needed because we have drifted... and He breaks in to touch us...
      - And sometimes we need Him to come to restore us when we have sinned and fallen into hardness—He sends someone to us or He visits us through a sermon or some providence and opens our eyes afresh.



- He is the God who touches us again.

TRANS> But I bet you might be wondering about something.

C. Why doesn't the LORD just go on and heal us completely the first time? Why doesn't He simply go on and make us perfect?

1. We may not know all of the reasons, but we need to trust Him.
  - He is the Lord and He has His reasons for working the way He works.
  - He is God and we can be certain that they are good reasons.
2. But one reason for sure is that part of the revelation He gives to us is the revelation of how hardened we really are in our sins.
  - We see how much work needs to be done in us—concentrated, focused work by the Lord, taking us aside and using the means He has appointed.
  - We see how great His grace is and how powerful His work is when we see how sinful and hardened we really are.
    - Interestingly, we learn this lesson best when we are trying our best to serve Him—which we certainly ought to do.
      - When we really are trying our best to follow Him to receive His grace, we actually make more progress,
        - but at the same time we see our weakness most of all because, try as we might, we see that we still have a long way to go.
    - Undergraduate students are the proud ones—they think they know all there is to know...
      - PhD students tend to be much more humble—they realise that for all that they have attained, they have only scratched the surface.
    - So part of the LORD's reason for not perfecting us all at once is to show us how desperate our condition is.
      - Don't you think the twelve learned this where Jesus did not perfect them all at once even though He spent focused time with them?
3. Another reason He works in stages is to show us His grace and patience.
  - He shows us that He loves us and is willing to keep working on us even after He has already done so much with us.
  - Again and again He comes back, and again and again we learn the depths of His mercy as the One who will not abandon us.
4. Perhaps He also does it to show us that His way of transforming us is tied together with our receiving and responding to Him.
  - There is something dynamic about His work in us.
  - He changes us, but the change happens by us responding to His word as it comes to us—a response that is only possible by the working of His Spirit...
    - But a response that is still our own and our responsibility.

TRANS> So what shall we take away from this passage today?

**Conclusion:** Christian, has the Lord not marvellously blessed you?

- Can you not see how He has gone to great lengths with you?

- Praise be to His name. He will continue to do so.
  - He will keep on touching you until perfection is attained.