

This morning, we are in the tenth week of a sermon series I am calling “Savior and Lord,” looking at what it means to relate to Jesus as both Savior – the one who died for our sins to give us eternal life – and Lord – the one who we follow and emulate. We are working our way through Mark’s gospel in this series. Mark was Peter’s traveling companion, and the Gospel of Mark is mainly Peter’s eyewitness testimony of Jesus (Peter was first known as Simon before Jesus changed his name). Papias, who was the Bishop of Hierapolis and lived from about 60-135 AD, knew John, one of Jesus’ disciples, and wrote about Mark:

Mark became Peter’s interpreter and wrote accurately all that he remembered, not, indeed, in order, of the things said or done by the Lord. For he had not heard the Lord, nor had he followed him, but later on, as I said, he followed Peter, who used to give teaching as necessity demanded but not making, as it were, an arrangement of the Lord’s oracles, so single points as he remembered them. For to one thing he gave attention, to leave out nothing of what he had heard and to make no false statements in them.

This morning we’ll be in Mark 8 & 9, looking at what it means to be spiritually blind or to spiritually see.

Mark 8:22 - 9:13 - *They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. ²³ He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?" ²⁴ He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around." ²⁵ Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. ²⁶ Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't go into the village." ²⁷ Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?" ²⁸ They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." ²⁹ "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ." ³⁰ Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him. ³¹ He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. ³² He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." ³⁴ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose*

*it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? ³⁷ Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? ³⁸ If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels." ^{NIV} **Mark 9:1** And he said to them, "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power." ² After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. ³ His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵ Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters-- one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." ⁶ (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.) ⁷ Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" ⁸ Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. ⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. ¹⁰ They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what "rising from the dead" meant. ¹¹ And they asked him, "Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?" ¹² Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah does come first, and restores all things. Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected? ¹³ But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him."*

If you take a big picture view of Mark's gospel, there is a significant turn at the end of chapter 8. Up until this point, the main question has been, "Who is this Jesus?", and at the end of chapter 8, Jesus will ask his disciples point blank, "Who do you say I am?" And after we find the answer – "You are the Christ (the Messiah)", the story will begin going downhill to the cross, answering the question, "What has he come to do?"

This section begins with a curious account of healing. Some people bring a blind man to Jesus, asking him to heal their friend. Jesus spits on the man's eyes and puts his hands on him, and then asks if he sees anything. The man looks up and says, "I see people; they look like trees walking around." Jesus again puts his hands on the man's eyes, and this time the man can see clearly. What is going on here? Remember, Jesus has shown the ability to heal with his touch, sometimes even by people simply touching his garment, and other times he heals from a distance, without even being in the same room as the sick or dead person. So why does his

healing power seemingly not work completely with this man? Why does it take two touches to heal this man's blindness?

I think the reason it takes two touches, as well as the reason that Mark puts this in this particular section, is that the context of this passage this morning is all about spiritual sight. It is all about what it means to see clearly who Jesus is, and about how often we do not see clearly who He is and what it means to follow Him. Like the blind man, sometimes our spiritual sight is cloudy, like seeing people who look like trees walking around, and it isn't until we get another touch from Jesus that we can see more clearly. Using that analogy, let me talk this morning about spiritual sight and what we learn from this passage.

1) Jesus gives us spiritual sight, and does it using different means for different people

The man is blind, and Jesus makes him see. Spiritually speaking, this is what the Bible proclaims. We are all spiritually blind until God gives us sight.

2 Corinthians 4:3-4 - And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴ The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

The Bible is clear that we can not make ourselves spiritually see, just as we can not make ourselves spiritually alive (read Ephesians 2). In the same way, we can't give anyone else spiritual sight. We can pray, but we can not make anyone see. Only God can lift the veil and help people see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.

Amazing grace – I was blind but now I see. In my life, I had a clear before and after. I saw God differently, fellowship differently, the Bible differently, sin differently. I was seeing things in a whole new light, unexplainable in human terms.

One of the most important implications of this doctrine is that we have no right to look down on anyone else. Our salvation is a free gift of grace. Our ability to know and see God is completely His doing. Sometimes we think we are smarter or better because we believe, but in reality we see only because of God's initiative.

And secondly, not only does Jesus give spiritual sight, but He does it using different means. He heals a few different blind people in the Bible, and He does it

in different ways. In Matthew 9 he touches a man's eyes. In Mark 10 he speaks a word and the man is healed. In John 9 he spits on the ground, makes mud, and puts it on the man's eyes, and in Mark 8, he spits on his eyes and touches them and he is healed.

What is the point? Sometimes we assume that the way God saved us is the way he saves everyone, but that is not true. God saves some people miraculously like Paul. Others he saves gradually like Peter. Some people are drawn by His love, and only later come to understand their sin. Some are convicted of their sin, and only later come to understand His love. Do not assume that just because someone was not saved the way you were that somehow it is inferior. And don't assume that just because you haven't had a miraculous salvation that somehow yours is illegitimate.

2) Spiritual sight is a progressive thing

Like this blind man, we don't gain perfect sight all at once. And like the disciples, we may know that Jesus is the Messiah, and still not know what that really means.

In this passage, Jesus asked the disciples who people say that I am. They reply that some think he's John the Baptist, others Elijah, and others one of the prophets. "But what about you?" he asks. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ."

What does "Christ" mean? Messiah, anointed one. The expectation was that the Messiah would come from God, defeat evil and injustice, restore Israel to its proper place, and make everything right in the world.

Jesus goes on to explain to them that he would suffer, be rejected by the religious leaders, be killed, and then rise again. And then Mark says that Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. No, Lord – this is not what it means to be the Messiah. You'll be the conquering hero. You'll overthrow Rome. How can you be a conquering hero by suffering and dying? And Jesus in turn rebukes Peter: "Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." Strong words, showing how even in our best intentioned encouragement, we may be motivated by something that is not of God. **Essentially, you see clearly that I am the Messiah, but you do not see clearly what that means.**

Then, after this, Jesus tells them in 9:1 that some will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power. And then he takes three of them up a mountain where they see Jesus transfigured and meeting with Moses and Elijah.

Talk about seeing more clearly who Jesus is! My understanding of heaven is that we will continue to see more of our God.

We see, but we don't really see. Early in my Christian life, I thought that I chose God, and that God was lucky to have me on His team. Only later did I come to a real understanding of sin and His grace, and realize that He saved me and uses me in spite of my sin, in spite of myself.

He goes on to tell them what it means to follow Him.

³⁴ *Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? ³⁷ Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? ³⁸ If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."*

Just as we can see without really seeing when it comes to God or to Jesus, we can see without really seeing when it comes to what it means to be His disciple. You think it's all about power and joy and miracles? No, Jesus says. It is also about self-denial, dying to self, losing your life in order to find it. **To follow Jesus means to radically abandon your own identity (psyche – life) and adopt a new identity as His child, His servant, one who has been loved and set free from sin by the grace of God, a follower of Christ, laying down your life and agenda to adopt the kingdom agenda.** Abandon your vocational identity. Abandon your relational identity. Abandon your sexual identity, your gender identity, your national identity, your racial or ethnic identity. And take up the identity He gives you. Seeking His kingdom first. Living to serve and lay down your life for others.

Your understanding of what it means to be a disciple is not complete. You don't see clearly what it means. In my life: why isn't everyone living the victorious life? God clearly opened doors for me. Then came the suffering and the struggle and the hard path. I saw but didn't really see.

Thank God He doesn't give it all at once.

Ephesians 1:17-19 - *I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may*

know him better. ¹⁸ I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

3) The more clearly we see God, the more we will be empowered to face the challenges of life

Jesus goes up the mountain.

² After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. ³ His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵ Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters-- one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." ⁶ (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.) ⁷ Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

He meets with Moses and Elijah – the law and the prophets, both of which Jesus fulfills. They come to encourage Him.

Luke 9:30-31 - Two men, Moses and Elijah, ³¹ appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.

They speak about his departure, of Exodus – a new freedom from slavery.

And he is enveloped by the love of the Father, who speaks words of love over Him. He is being emboldened for the task ahead of Him. And the disciples, even though they still don't fully see what is going on, are strengthened as well.

2 Peter 1:16-19 - We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." ¹⁸ We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. ¹⁹ And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to

a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

They hear direct testimony from heaven as to who Jesus is. The more clearly you see Him, the more you will love Him, the more you will worship Him, and the less the things and people of this world will have your heart. You will know that He is good, that He is sovereign, that He loves you. You will see His beauty. You will see Him dying for you, not letting you go. You will see Him working all things together for good. And you will have the strength to face anything that comes your way.

How do you see Him more clearly?

You can't manufacture it. But you can put yourself in position to see Him.

1) Worship & prayer

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 - *Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

2) Reading His Word

Romans 12:1-2 *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your spiritual act of worship. ² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-- his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

3) In fellowship & testimony

As we already said, as we share with others, we see God more clearly.

His friends brought him. Often our sight of God, ourselves, and discipleship is helped by hearing from other people.

Listen to this quote from C.S. Lewis' book *The Four Loves*:

*In each of my friends there is something that only some other friend can fully bring out. By myself I am not large enough to call the whole man into activity; I want other lights than my own to show all his facets. Now that Charles is dead, I shall never again see Ronald's reaction to a specifically Caroline joke. Far from having more of Ronald, having him 'to myself' now that Charles is away, I have less of Ronald. Hence true Friendship is the least jealous of loves. Two friends delight to be joined by a third, and three by a fourth, if only the newcomer is qualified to become a real friend. They can then say, as the blessed souls say in Dante, 'Here comes one who will augment our loves' ... In this, Friendship exhibits a glorious 'nearness by resemblance' to Heaven itself where the very multitude of the blessed (which no man can number) increases the fruition which each has of God. For every soul, seeing Him in her own way, doubtless communicates that unique vision to all the rest. That, says an old author, is why the Seraphim in Isaiah's vision are crying 'Holy, Holy, Holy' to one another (**Isaiah 6:3**). The more we thus share the Heavenly Bread between us, the more we all have.*

Lewis is talking about what it was like when one of his close friends died, and how instead of having more of the other friend, he now had less of him, because there were certain things about that friend that were only brought out by the deceased friend. We all need friends of different backgrounds and approaches in order to bring out unique aspects of our character and challenge us in different ways.

4) Serve others

Matthew 25:31-40 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the **sheep** from the **goats**. ³³ He will put the **sheep** on his right and the **goats** on his left. ³⁴ "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' ³⁷ "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in

prison and go to visit you?' ⁴⁰ "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

Pray that the Lord would help you to see Him more clearly.