

Seeing Everything Clearly

The Gospel of Mark: Mighty and Mild / Mark 8:22-38

Introduction:

As we come to the turning point in the gospel of Mark today, we reach a pivotal moment in the message of the gospel that we must understand. Our passage today contains the first of 3 declarations by Jesus of His pending death in Jerusalem, often called His passion predictions. Each prediction is followed by a failure of the disciples and correction by Jesus of what it means to follow Him. These verses also contain a significant confession by the disciples of who Jesus is and yet, the next eight chapters will continue to reveal a slow increasing of their understanding of Jesus' mission, which will only be fully realized after His death and resurrection. Because of the important truths in this passage, we will move right into the text. The confession of who Jesus is, first passion prediction, and correction by Jesus of what it means to follow Him, is set up by Mark with a unique healing miracle, in verses 22-26, showing,

The Need to See Clearly

This story has a strong emphasis on the idea of sight in the original language. As James Edwards notes, "in the original Greek there are eight different words used for nine instances of seeing in 8:23-25" (James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 243). And in the context of Mark's narrative, we are meant to remember how Jesus asked the disciples "do not yet see" in the previous story as we observe this healing. Look at the focus on sight and uniqueness of this miracle in verses 22-26, "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 people, but they look like trees, walking.' 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.'" This healing begins and ends like most interactions have with Jesus. When Jesus arrives in Bethsaida, people bring Him someone in need of healing and beg Jesus to heal him. At the end of this healing, Jesus sends the man away, encouraging him not to say anything. Though that command is not present in verse 26, it is implied in the command to not enter the village. We even see Jesus taking this man away from the crowd, just like He did with the deaf and mute man at the end of Mark 7. These similarities appear to be emphasizing the striking difference in this interaction. Note how this healing involves two steps. In verse 23, Jesus lays His hands on the man and asks him, "Do you see anything?" We discover that the man could see something but not fully, so Jesus lays His hands on the man again. And notice the ending, "he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly." This is completely unique to anything we have seen before this. Think about it for a moment. Just a few stories back, Jesus casts a demon out of the Syrophenician woman's daughter without even being present. In the healing of a deaf and mute man, he said, "Be opened" and the man could instantly hear and speak plainly. Yet, this healing involved two touches by Jesus before the man saw everything clearly. Why? Sinclair Ferguson helpfully captures the reason saying, "Was it that this man was a particularly 'difficult case' for Jesus? Hardly! Was this miracle then—like others—a sign? Yes! But to whom? To the man? No!—to the disciples. And this is confirmed by the fact that Jesus had already asked them about their vision of Him (v. 18). He was now leading them by the hand to the point at which their sight would become much clearer, and Peter would confess 'You are the Christ' (v. 29). Their spiritual understanding did not come instantaneously, but gradually. They, too, needed the second touch from the hands of their Master." (Sinclair Ferguson, *Let's Study Mark*, 125). Church, Mark's inclusion of this miracle serves to highlight the disciples' growth in their understanding of Jesus. They have been blind, and just like this blind man, they needed the consistent touch of Jesus to reveal who He truly is and what He has come to do. And this is not unlike our continued growth in understanding, is it? We need to receive the consistent touch of Jesus to see everything clearly.

The next scene, in verses 27-38, reveals what it means to see clearly, as we see the disciples' partial sight and hear Jesus teach on what it means to see fully. We find that seeing clearly means three things. First, it means,

Confessing Jesus as The Christ

Verses 27-30 are the first time a human character confess the true person of Jesus in this gospel. We have heard God the Father declare it, and even the demons declare it, but have yet to hear it from a person. Notice how the disciples are brought to this confession in verses 27-30, "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." The location is an unlikely place for a truth like this to be disclosed. Caesarea Philippi was known for being full of idolatry and hostility to the Jewish faith. It is on the road to a place like this that Jesus engages the disciples in a series of questions to bring them to a right confession of who He is. First, He has them think through who other people think He is. He is "John the Baptist... Elijah; ..." or "one of the prophets." Their answer links back to the thoughts of those around Herod in chapter 6. The responses of others reveal an insufficient answer, that is willing to admit Jesus is someone unique but not the truth of who He has disclosed Himself to be. Elijah, who we heard read about earlier was a particularly unique answer because he had been taken up into heaven in 2 Kings 2:11 and was understood to return before the day of the Lord, that is promised in Malachi 3 and 4. These answers show that others were close to seeing Jesus, by recognizing He was from God, but simply being close to seeing clearly is not enough. So, in verse 29, Jesus presses deeper to ask who the disciples say that He is. Peter answers correctly, likely for all the disciples, "You are the Christ." Christ is a title that means Messiah, which means both King and savior. The Messiah was the one promised to come and save His people from their enemies and reign as King on the throne of David forever. Jesus' series of questions led the disciples to make a personal confession that is against popular opinion. And this is what it means to see Christ clearly. It means to separate Him from everything the world wants to say He is and recognize Him for who He truly is. Jesus can't just be another prophet, or a good moral teacher. He can't just be a miracle worker, or any other man. He must be in a category by Himself, and we must confess Jesus as the Christ, our King and savior. Yet, seeing clearly is more than just making a confession, it also means,

Knowing Jesus Had to Die

Verses 31-33 give us the first prediction Jesus makes about His death in Jerusalem, and it leaves a stain on Peter, because while Peter rightly confessed Jesus was his King and savior, he didn't understand what he truly needed saving from. Look at the prediction with me in verse 31, "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." Jesus teaches them the Son of Man must suffer many things. The Son of Man is a title for the one from Daniel 7 who would stand before God and be given dominion over "all peoples, nations, and languages." This is who Jesus teaches will suffer. Not only will the Son of Man suffer but He will be rejected by all the religious authorities in Israel. Church, these aren't the worst of society who reject Jesus but the best. Not only will He be rejected, He will be killed. The Son of Man, who is to be given dominion over "all peoples, nations, and languages" will be killed. But His death will not be the end because He will rise three days later. Make a note how Jesus teaches these things must take place. As Danny Akin says beautifully, "All of this must happen. It is necessary. It is what the Scriptures promised. This is why He came. This is what sin's payment demands and we cannot provide. This is where the law of God and the love of God will meet! This is where judgment and grace kiss! Rob the word "must" of its meaning, and you empty the gospel and the cross of its glory" (Daniel L. Akin, Exalting Jesus in Mark, 174). The Son of Man must suffer and die. Notice what happens next in verses 32-33, "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.’” Peter just cannot accept this, even though Jesus said it plainly. So, Peter decides he needs to rebuke Jesus and set Him back on the right path. “Jesus you just don’t understand, I know you are the Christ, but the Christ doesn’t die, he rules. Let me explain this to you.” Now, it is likely that the rest of the disciples weren’t thinking that differently from Peter, because when Jesus rebukes Peter, he turns to all of them. Pay attention to the rebuke, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” Peter’s rebuke is connected to the schemes of Satan because it is aimed at keeping Christ from fulfilling His purpose. The plan of God was for the Christ to suffer and die. The things of God involved the suffering of His Messiah. Seeing clearly means knowing Jesus had to die. Which means we know the reason He had to die. We know the depths of our sin, we know our inability to be right with God, and we know we need forgiveness. We know a sacrificial offering needed to be made for us and we know that Jesus stood in our place as He was hanging on the cross, to bear the just punishment for our sin. Seeing clearly means we know Jesus had to die. There is one more thing this passage shows us, that seeing clearly means,

Following Jesus in Sacrifice

Verses 34-38 are some of the hardest verses for us to fully embrace. We may know what they say and even agree with them intellectually, but do we really live what they are saying? Look first at the clear call of discipleship in verse 34, “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.” Note that Jesus calls the crowd and disciples together to ensure everyone following Him understands this truth. This isn’t just for the apostles, it is for us all. Three things are involved in this call. First, denying ourselves. To deny yourself goes a lot deeper than we are often willing to admit. It involves sacrificing your determination to please yourself and seeking to live for another. It involves being willing to deny your comforts and even aspirations. It means taking the idol of self and removing it as the thing you value the most. Second, Jesus says take up your cross. The cross was a notoriously gruesome way to die. It was used for the worst of criminals and involved a slow and painful death. In a crucifixion, these criminals were made to pick up the horizontal beam of the cross and paraded down the streets carrying it to the place of your pending death. We will see Jesus do this in Mark 15. That is the imagery Jesus is using here. This means the idol of self isn’t just set aside, it is put entirely to death. It means you live in this life in a way that everyone knows you have died to yourself. Finally, Jesus says to follow Him. This means you live as Christ directs you and you treasure Him above all else. Church, each of these things involve sacrifice, but it is a sacrifice that will be well worth it. Notice the reasons Jesus gives for heeding this call, in verses 35-38, “For whoever would 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 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 also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.” Each verse begins with the word “for” revealing a series of escalating reasons for the challenge Jesus has just given. Consider these with me. The first reason is that the way to save your life is by losing it for the sake of Christ and the gospel. The world tells us constantly not to sacrifice who we are. If we do so we lose our true self and that is what causes all our struggles. Jesus never says protect yourself, He says lose your life. But notice, this sacrifice isn’t for any reason. It isn’t for your spouse, kids, friends, job, or community. It is for Christ and His gospel. You see, sometimes we may live in sacrifice and think we are following Jesus, but the motivation and goal of that sacrifice has nothing to do with Jesus at all. If it isn’t for the sake of Christ and His gospel, it doesn’t meet this call. The second and third reasons build on each other, essentially telling us that gaining the entire world while sacrificing our soul is of no profit because you can’t go back at the end of this life. The reference to our souls is beginning a reference to eternal life with God that is picked up in the fourth reason in verse 38. Note the contrasts of the current world and eternity in verse 38.

The current environment we find ourselves in is an “adulterous and sinful generation.” When Jesus speaks of adultery here, he isn’t talking about unfaithfulness between a married couple. He is talking about the reality that the world’s sin and unfaithfulness to God is akin to adultery. God has showered His love and grace on the world, and it, in return, has spurned that love and grace by rejecting His good rule over their lives. Sin, at its core, is a not just doing bad things but rejecting a holy, perfect, infinitely valuable God. Eternity, on the other hand, is described as being in the glory of God with the holy angels who cry out day and night of the His perfect majesty and beauty. It is basking in the glory of God for all eternity. And Jesus says if you are ashamed of Him and His words in this life, He will be ashamed of you when He returns, meaning that glory will not be available to you. Enjoying the holy, perfect, infinitely valuable God with not be available for you. Now, make sure you notice this is a reason for the call of verse 34. This means that being ashamed of Christ is not denying yourself, being ashamed of Christ is not picking up your cross, and being ashamed of Christ is not following Him. Church, this is so important to see because if we take verse 38 out of context and just have it stand on its own, we can think it only means not saying “I am a Christian” if someone asks you. But, when we keep it in context, we realize continuing to live for ourselves and not following in Jesus in sacrifice is being ashamed of Him in this adulterous and sinful generation. There is a truth that we need to face, that author David Platt exposes saying, “We... have a way of taking the Jesus of the Bible and twisting him into a version of Jesus that we are more comfortable with... A Jesus who doesn’t mind materialism and would never call us to give away everything we have. A Jesus who is fine with nominal devotion that does not infringe on our comforts. A Jesus who wants us to be balanced, who wants us to avoid dangerous extremes, and who for that matter wants us to avoid danger altogether.” (Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, quoting David Platt, 172). How are you denying yourself, taking up your cross, and following Jesus? Denying yourself and following Jesus could mean you give of your time on Wednesday evenings to serve with the kids or middle school students. Or choosing to come earlier on Sunday mornings to pray for the church and take part in a class to grow in your love for Christ instead of sleeping in. It could mean you let go over your vacation home or buy a less expensive car and give more to missions. Or intentionally moving to a less safe neighborhood to reach people with the gospel. It might mean sacrificing a week of your vacation to serve at youth camp or on the mission field. Or it may mean hearing a call to leave home and take the gospel to a remote village somewhere in this world that has never heard the truth of Jesus before. As I have meditated on this passage, I have wondered how often Jesus might rebuke us, like Peter, because our minds are not set on the things of God, but on the things of man. We must continually strive to see everything clearly.

Conclusion:

Seeing everything clearly means we confess Jesus as the Christ, know He had to die in our place, because of our sin, and following Him in sacrifice for His glory and our joy. Church, I know these are hard truths to hear, and there is a wrestling in your hearts to not just write them off. My exhortation to us, because I am speaking to my own heart as well, is look at the words of Christ in the pages before you and see the truth in them. As the worship team is coming up to lead us in an extended time of response, set your gaze upon the glory of Jesus and ask Him to teach you how to respond. This morning, I am going to leave that application to the work of the Holy Spirit. As always, I want to invite any and all who are led by the Spirit to do so, to come and kneel before the Lord or come and have one of the people on our prayer team pray for you and with you, who you will find worshipping on the front rows or at the bottom of the stairs.

Would you pray with me as we press into God’s grace?