

Mark 8:22–30 — Jesus Cures Spiritual Blindness

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Welcome to CrossWinds! Unfortunately, summer is over. Labor Day is past. The kids are back in school. The good news is that things feel better when we get into a routine. So we can enjoy the sense of organization fall brings. All hope for the fun of summer is not lost. We still have the Clay County Fair this week to finish our summer fun. Some more good news about fall is that today we return to our study in the Gospel of Mark.

Since we were away from this book for a while, I have two broad goals this morning. First, I want to reacquaint us with this Gospel. Second, we will study a few more verses in this Gospel. Let's begin by reacquainting ourselves with this book.

Mark 1:1-8:21 — Jesus gave more than enough evidence of his identity.

One of the first things we learned about the Gospel of Mark is that it is not an unorganized letter, like we might write a friend. It is highly structured and carefully crafted. For example, the Gospel of Mark has 16 chapters. The first eight are about answering the question, Who is Jesus? The last eight chapters are about answering the question, why did Jesus come? The Gospel of Mark is neatly divided in half, and the two halves are organized around answers to those two questions.

In the first eight chapters, Jesus did a lot of teaching. Besides his teaching, he performed a number of miracles. They were not ordinary miracles. They were miracles on a grand scale that would catch everyone's attention. Jesus' miracles were more than just acts of compassion toward people in need,

but each miracle told us something about Jesus and his identity. Each of Jesus' miracles contained a message that answered the question, who is Jesus? Let me show you.

Jesus cured the leper.

One of Jesus' first miracles was the curing of a man of leprosy. That doesn't sound significant, but when we studied that miracle, we learned it was very significant. Leprosy is a terrible debilitating disease that rots fingers, toes, noses, ears and lips right off the body. It leaves people looking hideous and disfigured with missing body parts. Leprosy also transforms the skin into a rough scaly hide accompanied by the smell of rotting human flesh. That was the leper that came to Jesus. The Bible text told us he had a severe case of leprosy.

When Jesus touched him, his leprosy was healed instantly and completely. That meant Jesus created the body parts he was missing and restored them to his body. Jesus' healing of the man with leprosy was a miracle on the order of creation itself. Just as God made everything out of nothing in the Genesis creation story, Jesus made body parts out of nothing in his healing of this man. This miracle connected Jesus with Genesis. The God of creation created bodies out of nothing. Jesus created body parts out of nothing. Jesus did something only God can do.

The question of the first half of this book is, who is Jesus? This miracle tells us.

Jesus cured the paralytic.

As the first half of Mark continued to unfold, Jesus cured a paralytic. At the time, Jesus was in Peter's house. He was teaching in a room that was packed with people. Nobody would let the paralyzed man into the room. Finally, the paralyzed man's friends hit upon an idea. They tore a hole in the roof of the building and lowered the paralyzed man on his cot via ropes until he landed in front of Jesus. Many thought Jesus would simply heal the man, but that is not what he did. He told this man that his sins were forgiven. That wasn't expected! That wasn't allowed! As many in the room knew, nobody can forgive sin but God alone. How could Jesus say such a thing?

Jesus then said, "So you will know the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins, I tell you, take up your mat and walk." With that, the paralytic was instantly healed. He took up his mat and went home. Notice what happened. Jesus forgave sin. Nobody can forgive sin but God alone. To prove he can forgive sin, Jesus healed this man. This miracle also answers the question, who is Jesus? that hangs like an umbrella over the first eight chapters of this book. Who is Jesus? He forgives sin. He does what only God can do.

Jesus calmed a storm.

A little later, Jesus calmed a ferocious storm. Jesus was asleep in the boat while his disciples guided the boat across the Sea of Galilee. The disciples suddenly found themselves in a ferocious storm. It packed Hurricane Dorian-like winds. The storm tore the sails. The waves rose and began crashing over the sides of the boat, filling it with water faster than the disciples could bail. The

disciples feared for their lives and were ready to go down with the ship so they woke Jesus. Jesus simply spoke to the storm and said, "Peace, be still."

Instantly the howling winds were transformed to complete calm. The Bible tells us the waves that were crashing over the sides of the boat stopped. The water instantly went flat, dead calm. In that miracle, Jesus spoke to creation and creation obeyed his voice. Only God has the power to command creation and have it obey. Jesus commanded creation, and it obeyed his voice. What does this tell us about Jesus? This miracle also answers the question that hangs over these opening chapters, who is Jesus?

Jesus cast a legion of demons out of a man.

As this Gospel continued, Jesus ran across a man that nobody could control. He was possessed by a legion of demons. Thousands of demons energized the man, flowing like a sinister energy through his veins. When people chained him, he would break the chains apart and terrorize people. There was nothing people could do to get him under control. Yet, when this demon-possessed man saw Jesus, he ran to Jesus and fell down before Jesus quaking in fear. These unstoppable demons that had possession of that man trembled in the presence of Jesus. With just a word, Jesus commanded all the demons out of the man into a herd of pigs that ran down the local hillside and drowned in the lake. When the demons left this man, the demon-possessed crazy man was restored to sanity. He was clothed and in his right mind.

In that miracle, when the demons were petrified before Jesus, they begged Jesus to not sent them into the abyss. What is the abyss? As we trace

our fingers through Scripture we learn the abyss is a place of temporary confinement where God has imprisoned some particularly wicked demons to wait for the day of final judgment. There is only one being in the universe who has the authority and power to imprison powerful demons in a place of confinement until judgment day. That is God. Yet, these demons realized Jesus also had the power to confine them to the abyss. Jesus had the power to confine them to the abyss because Jesus is God. This miracle also answers the question that hangs over these opening chapters. Who is Jesus?

Jesus raised a young girl from the dead.

As the Gospel continued, we met Jairus. He was the ruler of a local synagogue. He came to Jesus to get help for his daughter, but by the time Jesus arrived, that precious little girl was dead. She was not partially dead, like the Princess Bride. She was completely dead. Her body was decomposing like the dead in the Bahamas after Hurricane Dorian. Her body was cold. It was blue. There was no breathing. There was no heartbeat. There was no brain activity. She was lifeless. The little girl was gone.

When Jesus entered the room, everything changed. He took her by the hand and spoke a word to her. Instantly, her body grew warm. Her heart began beating. She took a deep breath and opened her eyes. She rose from the bed and went to the corner of the room to resume playing with her toys, like she awoke from an afternoon nap. Her parents collapsed to the floor in tears and hysterical joy.

Jesus did something only God can do. Only God can create life. Only God can bring the dead back to life, yet that is what Jesus did. He brought a little girl, who was dead, back to life. How does that answer the question lingering over the first half of this Gospel — who is Jesus?

Jesus fed the 5,000 and the 4,000.

As Mark continued, Jesus escaped with his disciples to the wilderness to get away from the crowds. While he tried to get away from people, people would not get away from him. They followed Jesus into the wilderness. Jesus didn't ignore those who followed him. He cared for those who followed him. He taught them. When they grew hungry, there was nothing to eat. In the wilderness, there was no place to buy food. People hadn't come prepared for a camping trip. What would happen to this vast famished crowd? There was a little boy who had a Lunchable from his parents. He offered his Lunchable to Jesus to share with crowd, even though it seemed an insignificant drop in the bucket for so many people. The Bible tells us there was 5,000 people. That number is low. That was just the men. The real number was more like 20,000 hungry people that followed Jesus into the wilderness, and the only food they had was a little boy's Lunchable.

What did Jesus do? He began multiplying it in the palm of his hands. He broke bread and fish. While he broke them, he multiplied them. He made so much food that all 20,000 people ate and were satisfied. They had more than enough.

As these people ate this miraculous food that Jesus made in the wilderness, they couldn't help but think about their ancestors who also found themselves hungry in the wilderness with nothing to eat. The God who had brought them out of Egypt had provided bread from heaven — called manna. He blew in quail from the sea giving them meat to eat. Their forefathers ate miraculous bread and meat in the wilderness that was provided by God. They ate and were satisfied. In a similar way, Jesus now provided miraculous bread and meat for them in the wilderness. They also ate and were satisfied. It was impossible for these people to not see the parallels between themselves and their ancestors.

The God of the Old Testament and Jesus did the same thing. They provided more than enough miraculous food for people to eat in the wilderness. What does this tell us about the identity of Jesus, and his connection to the God of the Old Testament? How does this answer the question that hangs over these opening chapters? Who is Jesus?

Jesus gave hearing and speech to a deaf-mute man.

As we continue refreshing ourselves with what happened in the first half of this Gospel, we run across Jesus healing a man who was deaf and mute. While healing this man's hearing was amazing, and loosening the man's tongue was astounding, those were only minor parts of this miracle. Remember this man had never heard language. He had never spoken words. Jesus implanted language into this man's brain because immediately upon his healing he could hear and understand language he had never heard. He could also speak a language he

had never spoken. Jesus planted that ability into his brain. Who can do that but God alone?

Yet, it was Jesus who implanted what the Bible says was perfect comprehension and perfect speaking into this man's brain. What does this tell us about Jesus? Jesus did what only God can do. This is another miracle that answers the question, "Who is Jesus?"

For you and me, the mounting pile of evidence is clear. Who is Jesus? He is God in the flesh because he was doing the things that only God can do. But while the evidence is clear for us, as the first half of this book closes, this pile of evidence is not clear for anyone else in this Gospel.

The religious leaders still did not understand the identity of Jesus.

The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him. And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, "Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation." And he left them, got into the boat again, and went to the other side. Mark 8:11–13 (ESV)

The religious leaders refused to believe Jesus. They refused to understand the pile of evidence in front of them about Jesus. What amazes me most about the unbelief of the religious leaders is this scene takes place immediately after Jesus fed the 4,000, which was really 17,000 people. This took place less than 24 hours after Jesus miraculously fed all those people. The religious leaders ignored the miraculous multiplication of food that just took place by Jesus' hands. At this point in the Gospel, the religious leaders had seen many miracles. They were eyewitnesses to hundreds, maybe thousands of Jesus'

miracles. They saw Jesus heal the sick. They saw Jesus raise the dead, but they still would not believe.

They claimed they would believe if Jesus would just provide a little circus sideshow entertainment for their amusement. If Jesus would simply provide a few signs in the heavens, they claimed they would believe. If Jesus would move around a few planets in the nighttime sky, they would believe. If Jesus would blink the sun on and off a few times, they said they would believe.

What do you think? Do you think they would have believed if Jesus had succumbed to their request for a little miraculous sideshow entertainment? Absolutely not. They already had more than enough evidence from his miracles, yet they were hardened in unbelief. They refused to see Jesus' identity even though they were tripping over the piles of evidence in front of them.

The disciples still did not understand the identity of Jesus.

It was not just the religious leaders that were blind to the identity of Jesus, but even Jesus' own disciples, who had seen all the miracles up close and personal, were blind to Jesus' identity. While the disciple saw the abundant evidence up close and personal, they just couldn't put the pieces together to understand the evidence of the identity of Jesus. Look how Mark 8 continues and tells us about the disciples' total spiritual blindness after showing us the blindness of the religious leaders.

Now they had forgotten to bring bread, and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. And he cautioned them, saying, "Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." And they began discussing with one another the fact that they had no bread. And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes do you not see, and having

ears do you not hear? And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?" They said to him, "Twelve." "And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?" And they said to him, "Seven." And he said to them, "Do you not yet understand?" Mark 8:14–21 (ESV)

They were in the boat traveling to the other side of the lake and Jesus was cautioning them to watch out for the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod. What is this leaven that Jesus was talking about? Let me cut to the chase and skip the technical background. Jesus was warning the disciples to be careful to avoid the unbelief of Herod and the unbelief of the Pharisees. In the face of abundant evidence, they were caught in hard-hearted unbelief. Hardened unbelief like that is catching. It spreads to other people like leaven in a batch of dough.

While Jesus was warning them to be careful of becoming like the Pharisees and being people of hard-hearted unbelief, a fight broke out on the boat. What were they fighting about? Lunch! In their hasty departure, someone forgot to pack lunch. All they had was one lousy loaf of pita bread, which was not nearly enough for 12 hungry men. The disciples were in a panic. Where would they get food? They were hungry. They were crabby. They were irritable. It felt like they were going to starve because one guy forgot to make sandwiches.

At this point, Jesus had enough. He just unloaded on them. "Do you not understand? Are your hearts that hard? Do you have eyes but you cannot see? Do you have ears but you cannot hear? Don't you remember when there were 20,000 hungry people and all we had was a little kid's Lunchable? I multiplied it and made made sure everyone had more than enough for everyone to eat. I didn't let anyone go hungry. Remember yesterday when we had 17,000 people that were famished? I took a few leftover loaves of bread and multiplied them to

feed 17,000 people. Nobody went hungry. Don't you understand? Are you so blind that you don't get it?"

Nobody was going to go hungry on that boat. Multiplying one loaf of bread to feed 12 people was a cake walk for Jesus.

At this point, the disciples had seen all the evidence needed to answer the question, who is Jesus? However, they were no different than the religious leaders. They remained spiritually blind to Jesus' true identity. We are halfway through the book and nobody could look at the evidence and see the identity of Jesus, until today.

Let's read our text.

Mark 8:22-30 — Jesus cured spiritual blindness.

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." 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. Mark 8:22–30 (ESV)

They were sailing on the boat to Bethsaida from Dalmanutha, which was also called Magadala. They just finished showcasing their blindness and complete spiritual ignorance in front of Jesus on the boat when they had a hissy fit because somebody forgot to pack lunch. The boat landed at Bethsaida, and Mark tells us a really strange miracle that unfolds as soon as they arrived.

None of the other Gospel writers told us about this miracle. It is one of two miracles only found in Mark. Let's examine this strange miracle.

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... Mark 8:22–23 (ESV)

When people brought a blind man to Jesus to be healed, Jesus took him by the hand and led him out of the village. Why did he do that? Jesus was going to heal this man, but he didn't want the general public of Bethsaida to see this particular healing. Jesus took this man to a secluded location where only this man and Jesus' disciples would be able to see what was about to take place. Why did Jesus insist on such privacy for his miracle?

As we saw earlier in this Gospel, Jesus' healings always held more than one dimension. They were not just acts of compassion toward the people in need, but they were intended to teach the people either something about Jesus' identity or something about the way God worked.

Remember that Jesus' miracles were not just miracles. They were miracles that contained messages for those who watched them. This particular miracle would not contain a message for the crowds. It contained a message reserved exclusively for the disciples. That is why Jesus insisted that only the disciples saw the miracle that was about to take place. Let's see what is the message of the miracle.

Jesus cured spiritual blindness in stages.

...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. Mark 8:23–25 (ESV)

This is a funky miracle. It looks like Jesus' first attempt at healing this man backfired. You might think this is the beginning of a fail blog for Jesus. Jesus didn't get it right the first time so he needed to try again.

Let's think about this. Did Jesus fail at this miracle? Is this the only miracle Jesus did wrong so he needed to try again? I don't think so. Jesus performed miracles far greater than this and he did not have an ounce of failure in any of them. Jesus opened the eyes of other blind men in the Gospels. He cured all of them instantly and completely the first time. Why did the healing of this man's sight take more than one step? What was the message of this miracle that it took more than one stage to restore this man's sight?

Let me give you the answer. Just as this man's physical blindness was healed in multiple stages over time by multiple touches from Jesus, in a similar way the disciples' spiritual blindness was about to be healed. Their spiritual blindness was healed in multiples stages over time by multiple touches from Jesus. The multi-stage healing of this physically blind man provided a template for the multi-stage healing of the spiritually blind disciples. Let me show you how this unfolded in this Gospel.

Remember, the disciples had all the evidence of Jesus' identity right in front of them, but up to this point they were not able to put the pieces together. They were still completely blind to Jesus' true identity.

Immediately after this, for the first time in this Gospel, somebody put the pieces together and understood Jesus' true identity. It was Peter. In a flash of insight, it all made sense. He got it right. He confessed that Jesus was the Christ.

Do you think Peter put this evidence together on his own? Was it his brilliant intellect and Ivy League schooling that gave him this insight? Absolutely not! Just as the physically blind man's sight was only restored by a miraculous touch from Jesus, Peter's spiritual blindness could also only be cured by a miraculous touch from God to open his spiritually blind eyes. That way Peter could see the evidence of Jesus' identity and put together the evidence of Jesus identity in a way that made sense.

You may wonder, was Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ literally a supernatural miracle from God that opened his blind spiritual eyes? Was Peter's recognition of Jesus as the Christ a true miracle from God on the same order as the physically blind man receiving his physical sight?

To prove to you Peter's spiritual sight was a miracle from God, let's look at this same scene as it was told to us in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew told us a little more of what Jesus said after Peter's confession of Christ unfolded.

Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven." Matthew 16:16–17 (ESV)

Yes, Peter's confession of Christ was a supernatural miracle of God to open his blind spiritual eyes to finally see and understand the identity of Jesus.

Here is where it gets interesting. Most of us think that once Peter had his spiritual eyes opened to see and understand the identity of Jesus, Peter would get it right from this point forward in the Gospel. That is not what happened. Just

as the physically blind man had his eyes opened by Jesus but at first his vision was fuzzy, until Jesus touched him again and made it clear, in a similar way Peter's vision of Jesus as the Christ was also fuzzy. While he saw Jesus as the Christ, he didn't see clearly what it meant for Jesus to be the Christ. It would not be until the end of the book after Jesus rose from the dead that Peter was touched by Jesus again and his fuzzy vision of Jesus as the Christ was finally clear.

Let me show you what I mean. Right after God opened Peter's eyes and Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ, Peter completely blew it. He saw Jesus as the Christ but only in a fuzzy way.

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 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." Mark 8:31–33 (ESV)

Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ. The first half of this Gospel is concluded. Peter discovered the answer to the question, who is Jesus? The Gospel immediately moves to answer the second question, what did Jesus come to do? Jesus clearly explained that as the Christ he came to be rejected by the elders. He came to die and rise from the grave on the third day. Jesus spoke about this clearly and without figures of speech.

What did Peter do? He told Jesus not to die. He told Jesus he is the Christ, but he told Jesus he is the Christ that needed to avoid the cross. Peter's vision of what it meant for Jesus to be the Christ was for Jesus to reign and rule but not to die. Peter's vision of Jesus as the Christ was fuzzy. It was off base.

Peter went from the top of the world when he confessed Jesus as the Christ in one paragraph, to getting yelled at by Jesus for the wrong understanding of what it meant for him to be the Christ in the next paragraph.

One question my wife and I discussed about this passage was why did Jesus use such a harsh reprimand? Why did Jesus say to Peter, “Get behind me Satan”? Those are hurtful words, but they were appropriate words. Who remembers Jesus’ temptations by Satan in the wilderness before his ministry began? One of the temptations the devil put before Jesus was that he could be the king, and he could avoid the cross. Peter also wanted Jesus to be the Christ, to be the king, but to be a Christ without a cross. The temptation Peter put before Jesus was the same temptation Satan put before Jesus when he was tempted at the beginning of his ministry in the wilderness. That is why Jesus said, “Get behind me Satan.”

So what we see is this blind man’s physical healing of blindness in multiples stages by multiple touches of Jesus set the template for what would happened in the rest of this Gospel as Jesus cured the spiritual blindness of the disciples. He cured their spiritual blindness in stages. Each stage of healing came from a touch of Jesus that allowed the disciples to see and understand him better and love him more.

Here is the big application. Just as Jesus cured the spiritual blindness of Peter and the other apostles in stages over time, Jesus is still in the business of curing spiritual blindness in stages over time today. Jesus supernaturally opens the eyes of people’s hearts to see the evidence and understand the identity of

Jesus, but when he does that, expect that people will still not see all there is to see about Jesus clearly. They will be fuzzy on many things and still in need of another touch from Jesus to bring more clarity to their spiritual vision of Jesus' true identity.

This means that as we meet other Christians, we should expect that many of them will still be fuzzy about the things of Jesus. They are between touches. Jesus has opened their spiritual eyes so they can see him and they love him, but they may not yet clearly see all that Jesus is and all he has done for us. Just like the physically blind man in this parable, they are in need of another clarifying touch from Jesus.

What does this look like in practice? You may meet someone who is in love with Christ but they come from the background of the prosperity gospel. They love Jesus but they love him because they think he will make them healthy and rich. Their vision of Jesus is fuzzy. We don't avoid them. We don't look down on them. We just realize they love Jesus but are in need of another touch from Jesus to clear up their spiritual vision.

Another example may be someone that comes from a background in the sciences. Now they love Jesus, but they are fuzzy about Jesus. They were schooled in evolution so the opening chapters of Genesis are hard for them to understand. They still love Jesus, but the idea of miraculous and instant creation by Jesus is something over which they are fuzzy. We don't look down on them. We don't avoid them. We love them and realize that are just between touches

from Jesus. We need to pray that Jesus would touch them again so he would open their eyes so they can see him better and love him more.

Think of what it was like for each of us when we first trusted in Christ. We loved Christ but we had some very screwy ideas about Christ. We needed to be touched again by Jesus through his Word so we could see Jesus with greater clarity, so we could understand the greatness of what God has done for us through him. So we see that just as Jesus cured this man's physical blindness in stages, he cured the disciple's spiritual blindness in stages. In a similar way, he still cures our spiritual blindness in stages today.

Spiritual blindness is cured in community.

One thing I noticed is that unless this blind man's friends cared about him, unless they were willing to bringing this blind man to Jesus, he would have never made it to Jesus. Remember this man was blind. There was no way he could have made it to Jesus on his own. He needed the help of his friends to get him there.

There is an interesting parallel. The only way for someone to be healed of their spiritual blindness is by Jesus, but the only way for someone to get that touch from Jesus is by that spiritually blind man's friends bringing him to Jesus. Just as the physically blind man's friends brought him to Jesus to be healed, we need to bring our spiritually blind friends to Jesus to be healed.

So as we close, we remember that just like the friends of this blind man, it is our responsibility to bring our spiritually blind friends to Jesus. Jesus will miraculously open their blind spiritual eyes, but when he heals them, we must

remember Jesus doesn't heal spiritual blindness all at once. He heals it in stages, just like he did for the disciples in the rest of this Gospel.

Application

1. Jesus cures our spiritual blindness in stages. Expect there will be people who love Jesus but still do not see him clearly.
2. Jesus cures spiritual blindness in community. He uses us to bring our friends to Jesus so he can open their spiritually blind eyes.



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