

Follow: Seeing Clearly

Mark 8:22-26

What are we trying to accomplish as a church body? I hope that you notice that we have the answer to that question written in your bulletin each week. If you have your bulletin handy, flip it over and let's read our mission statement.

Why even have a mission statement? Well, I don't know about you but I am often distracted. I need parameters from outside that keep me focused on what I am supposed to be doing. I leak information and enthusiasm.

But you can see that our mission statement defines our goal as a church as making followers of Christ. As elders, we asked the question: What is the main thing we, as the church, are here to do? We took our instructions from Jesus's words in Matthew 28:18-20. Of course, the main mission he gives to his disciples is to make more disciples. We are to reproduce ourselves through the proclamation of the gospel and the maturing of those God has called as disciples.

Jesus gives this mission to his disciples because they are continuing what he began in his earthly ministry. He called disciples to himself who were with him, were trained by him, and then were sent out from him to make more disciples. The big question for us today is, what does it actually mean to be a follower of Jesus? We are entering a section of the Gospel of Mark where that question will be the major focus. I want to show you how 8:22 – 10:52 fit into the overall structure of the book.

When you are studying a book of the Bible, it's always helpful to know how the book is set up. The author can communicate a lot just from the way he has put the stories together. The Gospel of Mark centers on Jesus and divides into two sections.

- The Authoritative Ministry of Jesus the Messiah (1:1 – 8:21)
- The Suffering Son of God as the Servant of the Lord (8:22 – 16:8)

So, we learn who Jesus is throughout the first section as we watch him teach, heal, and cast out demons. Then, the high point of the book at the end of chapter 8 transitions to the reality that this authoritative Messiah is going to suffer and die. So, how does our section, 8:22 – 10:52 fit into this? In this portion we get a

very clear statement of who Jesus is in 8:29 and then Jesus begins to teach that he will suffer and die in Jerusalem and that reality has massive implications for his followers. In other words, like a piece of metal fashioned by a blacksmith, disciples will be shaped and formed by who Jesus is and what He does.

But as you will see throughout this section, the disciples do not see these realities clearly. They need help and we need help to clarify our grasp of discipleship. So, as we study this little story of the blind man who receives sight we will learn some important lessons regarding discipleship. Today we will study **3 lenses to clarify our vision of discipleship**. We want to learn to be true followers of our Lord.

1. Discipleship is a Journey

Keep in mind the overall outline of the Gospel of Mark. Jesus has been revealing who He is by teaching and miracles. He has preached with authority beyond the scribes, dumbfounded the religious leaders, cast out demonic forces by His word, healed the sick and even commanded nature with His voice.

All during this revelation of his authority and person, the disciples have been watching. In fact, this group of disciples has been a main character in the gospel so far. Mark has painted a very complex picture of the disciples. **They are simultaneously committed to Jesus and willing to follow him, and yet very slow in grasping the reality of who He is.** Let me show you both sides of this response to Jesus. Listen to Mark 1:17-18. And now in 3:13-15. So, they clearly are loyally committed and Jesus officially designates them as apostles to be with him. He even gives them authority and power over demons.

But along the way the disciples seem confused. When they are caught in a storm on the Sea of Galilee in chapter 4 they panic rather than trusting Jesus. When he calms the storm, they react with shock and fear. Listen to 4:40-41.

A few chapters later in chapter 6 they see Jesus feed the five thousand in the wilderness and then watch him walk on the water in the middle of the night out to their boat. Listen to what happens there in 6:49-52.

Finally, in chapter 8 Jesus feeds the four thousand and the disciples still aren't grasping who He is. Look at 8:14-21. You can see that they aren't getting it and Jesus makes it clear that they are still blind to who HE really is and what it truly means to be a disciple. So, immediately following Christ's statement of their

blindness, we get this quick story of the blind man who is healed in stages. Look with me at verse 22.

The conversation of verses 14-21 happens on the boat and then they arrive to Bethsaida on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. People bring him this blind man to be healed. This is the first instance of a blind man being healed in Mark, but not the last. Look what Jesus does in verse 23.

He moves him away from the crowds, presumably to keep this as quiet as possible. But I want you to notice something different about the way Jesus heals this man. Typically, we see Jesus announcing the healing or simply touching a person, which brings healing. Here we see him ask a question of the man. I don't think it's coincidence that Jesus has just asked the disciples a very similar question in verse 18. This is intended as an introduction to what will happen to the disciples. Their discipleship is a journey to understanding.

Look at verse 24. If you've ever been to the eye doctor and had your eyes dilated, I think that is the experience of this man. He can see, but his vision is not clear. He sees shapes moving, but they are dark shapes against a bright sky. He can't make out the details. **This is the only miracle Jesus does in stages, which is exactly how the disciples understanding will come to them.** Look at verse 25. There are 3 different words used here to describe his vision being restored. He has unimpeded clarity now. He has been restored to the way things should be and he has entered into a new way of existing. He now sees everything clearly.

Just like this man receives his sight in stages, the section we will be studying in 8:22-10:52 will show the disciples being slowly taught about the full implications of discipleship.

Let's be honest with ourselves this morning. We are often hard-headed, blind and deaf when it comes to being followers of Jesus. We lack the clarity of vision needed to truly walk after him. But let me encourage you, this section of Scripture will make the essence of discipleship crystal clear for us. Let's try to bring some clarity with our next lens.

2. Discipleship is a Relationship

It's very easy for us to shift our discipleship, our walk with Christ away from a relationship with a person. But this entire section puts the person of Jesus and the

way He shapes discipleship on full display. Mark teaches us that if Jesus is who He reveals himself to be in this book, we cannot remain the same. We must take up our cross and follow him.

The key question when we come to a little story like the one we encounter in 8:22-26 is, who is Jesus? This is a Christ focused story. He's the one doing the miracle and what do we learn about him from this miracle? Well, I want you to notice how similar this story is to another healing story we saw in chapter 7. Look back with me at 7:31-37. I'm going to point out the similarities as I read this.

Look with me at how the people respond. So, we have the healing of a deaf man and a blind man here pretty close together. Of course, the questions in 8:18 bring these two healing stories together. What does it mean when an individual can bring hearing to the deaf and sight to the blind?

Well, turn with me to Isaiah 35. We looked at this text when we studied chapter 7 but I want to remind you of it. This passage was written hundreds of years before Jesus during a time when Israel was struggling in sin and exile was coming their way.

But this passage looks into the future and God promises that he will make things right and restore the nation of Israel by returning His presence to them. Look at verses 1-4. Now, look at the types of things that will happen when God comes to His people in verses 5-10.

As we study this section you will see that our responsibilities as disciples are directly related to the fact that Jesus is the Son of God, the Promised Messiah and the King. To be a disciple means to know Him, to delight in His glory and to value His worth as Savior. One Puritan writer, John Owen said this:

"Some talk much of imitating Christ and following his example. But no man will ever become 'like him' by trying to imitate his behavior and life if they know nothing of the transforming power of beholding his glory." – John Owen

Discipleship means seeing the glory of Jesus in his power and authority and in his humble death. What is it like to see glory? Well, Psalm 19 tells us that the heavens declare the glory of God so let's think about the ocean for a moment. Why do we continue to go back to the ocean on vacation? The ocean is both beautiful and powerful. We feel small next to the ocean because we recognize our own frailty.

The ocean inspires poems and songs because as a reflection of God it is glorious. There's a sense of awe and satisfaction that we get from standing next to the ocean and that causes us to return time and again.

That sensation of glory is a microcosm of the glory of Christ that we must behold as disciples. Another author Maurice Roberts said this of the glory of God's love for us.

"Once a believer has tasted this love of God in his soul he can never rest content till he has it again and again." – Maurice Roberts

And it's this encounter with glory that changes us and matures us as disciples.

I believe one of the best descriptions of this in Scripture is found in 2 Corinthians 3:18. This is why we cannot be distracted into thinking discipleship is about anything other than Jesus. But none of us can enter into this process of discipleship based on our own merit or worth. And this brings us to our last lens.

3. Discipleship is a Gift

In this story of the blind man healed the obvious point is that Jesus heals him purely based on his own grace. You do not go from blindness to sight through your own power.

This section on discipleship begins with a story of blindness becoming sight and it also ends with a story regarding blindness. Turn over to Mark 10:46-52. Let's read this story but notice that the man fully acknowledges that his sight depends on the mercy of Jesus. And once his eyes have been opened, notice what he does at the end of verse 52. A fitting end to a section on discipleship.

The whole section is framed by two stories of men who are healed from blindness. The indication is that though the disciples do not currently grasp who Jesus is and the consequences of that for discipleship, they will.

And this is something we can never move away from in the journey of discipleship. We must never forget that this whole thing started as a divine gift of grace.

Each person here was born a rebel with a will stiffened against God. We were under the dominion of the evil one and our hearts were blind to the glory of

Christ and our own need for salvation. We were running away from God's love down a path of complete rejection and animosity. You and I were born the enemies of God.

But God, rich in grace, sent Jesus Christ to earth to change enemies to friends. Jesus died in the rebels place. He took the punishment we deserved when he didn't deserve it. Now, by His Holy Spirit, he reaches out and gives life to dead hearts. He turns enemies into friends and literally turns us 180 degrees. Instead of running down a path away from God and toward self-destruction, he puts us on the path of discipleship. We become followers of Jesus by his grace.

No matter how long you have been on this path of discipleship this morning, it's still a miracle that you are on it at all. It's a gift to be rejoiced in and made much of. It's a blessing to be talked about and rehearsed to your neighbors and friends. God made his enemy his follower.