

I just want to say that thanks to optometrists and ophthalmologists, I can even see you today. I am extremely nearsighted. I'm as blind as a bat without lenses. Somebody said to me one time that if one of your senses is weak, your other senses tend to be stronger. My wife said years ago that I couldn't see very well, but I sure have a keen sense of smell. So I have that going for me. But I recently had my eyes checked, and it's one of those things where they ask what is the smallest letter you can read on this chart. And I ask, "What chart?" So without glasses or contacts, everyone in the front row would look like a bush sitting there. I wouldn't be able to distinguish anybody. It's just something I've dealt with over the years. I'm thankful that I have lenses that can help me see.

The Bible makes it clear that there may be some of us who can see 20/20 physically, but are spiritually blind. And among the examples in the Bible, Jesus draws special attention here in Mark to the Pharisees.

Last week, Kevin showed us in Mark 8:11 that the Pharisees confronted Jesus asking for another sign from heaven, testing him. And how ironic is that since Jesus had just fed the 4,000 with seven loaves and a few fish. Not to mention all the miracles that he had performed and all the powerful teaching that we've been exposed to here in chapters 1 through 8 of Mark.

So here's the thing, the Pharisees might have been able to see 20/20 physically, but they were spiritually blind, and they did not believe in Jesus. They did not want to believe in Jesus in spite of all the evidence. The world in which we live also suffers from spiritual blindness. The world is largely spiritual. We're spiritual in this world, and our world faithfully bows to a particular god of their own choosing, but they largely reject the fact that Jesus claims he's the way, the truth, and the life. And as unpleasant as it is to talk about the consequences of unbelief, there are consequences. There are eternal consequences.

Maybe there's somebody that's been led here today and is open to hearing about Jesus. I want you to know you won't be disappointed with the passage we're looking at today. And then there's where most of us are today. We have lived our lives. We have seen glimpses with great clarity of the grace of God in our lives, and we've sung about it. We have confessed Jesus as our savior. We have claimed the promise. We've received the gift of salvation. We have a basic understanding of who Jesus is. We believe in the efficacy of his work on the cross. By God's grace, through faith, we've received forgiveness for sins, and we have

the hope of heaven. Because of the cross, our spiritual eyes have been opened.

The amazing thing about this is because of what we know today, what we can see in God's word and study; we can see more clearly than the disciples could at this point in the Gospel of Mark. And yet we struggle to see clearly. We suffer from various degrees of nearsightedness and blurriness, and sometimes things look dim. We lack wisdom. Sometimes we feel that we're being formed more by the world than by Christ, but we have a hope. We have a hope to see more clearly, and this is the case for me, and it's the case for many Christians that I have met with, gotten to know, prayed with, and discussed scripture with.

We say, "God, I know you some, but I want to know you more. God, I understand some, but I want to understand more. God, I sense your closeness some, but I want your closeness more. God, I've seen your power and glory, but I want to see more of your power on glory." Here's the encouraging news We have been given by God, the capacity as followers of Christ to see and understand and experience God more through this personal relationship that we have with him. I hope you believe this. I know Paul believed it. If it wasn't true, why would he pray such a prayer as this?

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. I pray 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 his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. Ephesians 1:17-19

That's Paul's prayer for us. So this is our third message in Mark 8, and the reason why we're spending so much time here is that Mark 8 is actually the pinnacle of the whole Gospel of Mark. Up to this point, Jesus has been revealing who he is to the people, especially the Jewish people, and especially to the religious, the Pharisees.

In chapter 8, the Gospel of Mark turns a corner. Jesus is about to turn his attention from the populace out there to training the disciples for what's ahead for him and also for them. The disciples see some, but they need to see more. There are two recorded miracles in Mark that aren't found in any of the other three gospels. Our passage is one of them. The first one was a very familiar miracle story that we read about just a few weeks

back in chapter 7. So I want to review that miracle in chapter 7, and I want you to notice the similarities between what I'm about to read and the passage we are going to look at in a moment.

There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on him. After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means "Be opened!"). At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly. Mark 7:32-35

So we see that in this miracle in Mark 7, and the miracle we're going to look at today, it's as if they are bookends of a little sub-story within the gospel. Between those two bookends of those two miracles, Mark gives us this extended exposé about the dangers of spiritual blindness. Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for demanding one more sign. He warns the disciples that the Pharisees are clearly spiritually blind and not to follow them. He warns the disciples that the secular king Herod, who also claims to see clearly, is also spiritually blind. And then Jesus rebukes the disciples for their lack of understanding when they ask for bread after they had just seen Jesus feed the 4,000 on seven loaves and a few fish.

Mark 8:22 says this, *"They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him."* So Bethsaida was on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. It was a thriving town just on the east side of the Jordan River, where it dumps into the Sea of Galilee. Bethsaida means house of fish. So probably, fishing was a big industry there. It was the hometown, actually, of three of Jesus' disciples.

Peter, his brother Andrew, and Philip were born there. Jesus was well known in Bethsaida because he had performed many miracles there. And when Jesus and the disciples entered the town, some people brought a blind man to Jesus and begged Jesus to touch him. Maybe one of these friends had been touched and healed earlier, and they wanted to share it with their blind friend.

What we know for sure is they saw Jesus. They brought their friend to him, a blind man who desperately needed healing. We must remember that in this day, there were virtually no medical cures for really anything at all. The people lacked the understanding that we have regarding basic hygiene. They were exposed to the elements and nutritional issues. And sadly, blindness was a common ailment in that day. So we can picture a man whose eyes were clouded over, crusty, staring off, maybe flies swarming around him.

This poor man, actually, with all of that, had something going for him. He had friends who believed Jesus could heal him. They begged Jesus, his friends took the initiative, and they expected Jesus to heal their friend. So there's a lesson here for us in this.

We need to be brought into Jesus' presence to see clearly. In order to have spiritual understanding, we need to find it first by being brought to Jesus.

I hope each one of us here who have been brought to Jesus can remember that somebody loved you, somebody cared for you, maybe it was somebody who was touched by Jesus themselves and brought you to Jesus. They cared enough to bring you there, saw you had a need, you needed healing, you needed a touch, and said, "I'm going to bring him or her to Jesus." I hope this week you can think about who may be in your mind right now, that person or people are coming to mind, maybe reach out if they're still alive, and share your gratitude. Thank them for introducing you to Jesus. They didn't have to do that, but they cared enough about you to do that.

"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?'" (v. 23). So notice at this point in the story, the friends moved to the background and Jesus takes center stage. The friends had done their job. They loved the blind man. They brought him into the presence of Jesus. That's all they could do, and Jesus had to do the rest.

So what did Jesus do? It says that Jesus touched this blind man. This man who was unclean. People would see a blind person and ask why they were blind. They felt the person must have done something really bad for God to punish them with this. But what did Jesus do? He broke through the cultural barrier. He made a connection with somebody who was an outcast, who was suffering, and he is saying to everyone that everybody's reachable, everybody's worthy of love. Everybody is accepted by Jesus. There's no one he is going to turn away. Can you picture it as Jesus touched him, and then he's gently guiding him out of the city.

Have you ever had the opportunity to lead a blind person? Maybe in through unfamiliar territory? I had the opportunity. One time I was driving a friend of mine who was blind from Minneapolis to Chicago years ago. And I would cautiously kind of take him along and say, "Watch out. Here's an obstacle over here, so let's go this way. And there's a step right here." Just tenderly touching and leading him along until we got to where we needed to go, helping him to avoid obstacles. So I can just picture Jesus doing this in a tender, loving voice. Jesus is his eyes, his caretaker. Just get a grip on the tenderness of this scene. So why did he take him outside the city limits of Bethsaida? What's happening here is this quickly has turned into a private miracle, a private revealing for only his disciples to witness. If you look through the gospel, this is the last miracle he will perform in the Galilee region. Why is that? Because the people of Bethsaida, who were mostly Jewish, had already seen many miracles. Jesus had been there. Yet they were still spiritually blind, and Jesus was done with them. Things had to change. He needed to focus on his disciples.

In Matthew 11:21, Jesus offers this prophecy about the future of Bethsaida. *“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes”* (Matt. 11:21). That same Jesus who is tenderly leading a blind man also pronounces judgment. Historians record that the city in the first century was burned to the ground, basically by the Romans, but then in the fourth century, it was completely leveled by an earthquake. And so it remains to this day a monument to the tragedy of unbelievers.

This miracle is a premeditated private lesson for the disciples to open their eyes to the Messiah, to his mission, and then the mission of the disciples to follow. And for us, the lesson so far is not only do we need to be brought into the presence of Jesus to see clearly, we need to be led by Jesus to see clearly.

What are the dynamics of somebody being led, I want us to think about that for a minute. To me, they look like surrender, trust, a personal relationship, and physical contact for us to see clearly. We need to be led by Jesus. To a place where he can form us, and we need to be led away from powerful forces of unbelief in the world that want to deform us.

So being led implies leaving a former place, leaving people that we are accustomed to being around. Those who might be a bad influence or seek to talk us out of trusting God with our lives. Are there these people in these places still hanging around in your life that you need to disassociate from in order to be led by Jesus? Maybe old hangouts, old habits, destructive people, or tempting situations. We cannot be led by Jesus unless we surrender control and let him lead. We cannot be led by Jesus unless we stay in touch with him, and don't underestimate his desire to have a close personal relationship with you, no matter how distant you may feel even today.

So Jesus drew close to the man, and then he spits in his eyes. Again the second part of verse 23, *“When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, ‘Do you see anything?’”* First of all, you're probably asking why the spit. That seems kind of nasty. And you're thinking, why couldn't he use essential oils or something to do this? In Jesus' day, it was thought that putting saliva in the eyes was making an intimate connection to another and that there were healing properties in saliva.

William Lane said, “It was Jesus entering into the thought world of the man and establishing a deeper relationship with him.” It's a powerful picture when we look at this and see Jesus' desires to be so close that he entered into this man's world, this man's comfort zone with saliva to illustrate it, and he wants to enter into our world to help us understand his ways so we'll trust him. So why did Jesus ask the man if he saw anything? I mean, we know full well that Jesus knows exactly what that man saw or didn't see. And why did Jesus ask the man if he saw anything? When we know that Jesus has healed people all throughout,

instantaneously, anyone, anytime he chose. Scripture doesn't tell us why, but look at what comes next.

“He looked up and said, ‘I see people; they look like trees walking around’ (v. 24). He looked up. Literally, he raised his eyes to regain sight. The man can see, it's blurry, but he can see something. And the fact that he knew what a tree looked like is interesting because it tells us he probably wasn't born blind but was blind for some reason later in life. Who were these people that looked like trees walking around? It had to be the disciples because he pulled the man away from the town. So the man sees these blurry men walking around.

“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” (v. 25). I remember in the third grade when I got my first pair of glasses. I put them on, and I could see leaves on the trees. I'd never noticed that trees actually have individual leaves that flutter from a distance in the wind or we're supposed to see what the teacher writes on the board at school. It was life-changing.

What do we see here? A second touch. Every Greek word that has anything to do with sight Mark uses here. He lets us know that this man's sight was completely restored. He also wants us to contemplate that this healing, this particular healing came in two stages. Why two stages? Oh, it could be that maybe the man's initial lack of faith led to a partial healing. I don't think that was it. I think Jesus is trying to show us that in order to see more clearly, we will need, throughout our life, multiple touches by him.

That's life for anyone who's been a Christian for any length of time. We understand that we need multiple experiences with Christ to continue to be led, continue to submit, continue to surrender, and continue to leave behind those dim dark places, those places that make our spiritual eyes dull. Dull in how we choose relationships. Dull in our life choices about marriage, about finances, about career moves, about what is right and what is wrong about our spiritual life.

So the message here is that sight is restored. Whether God heals instantaneously or gradually, we leave that up to him. And I think this is symbolic that what God is revealing here is there are deeper levels of cures needed for those who need healing. The gradual healing could be a necessary tool for total healing. I think of, for example, our higher power ministry, our recovery ministry here on Friday nights where the 12 steps meet the cross week after week, daily leaning into God, abiding in him.

I think of our biblical counseling ministry, where God leads our counselors to do the important counseling work with scripture over a period of time. I think of the groups that we have here. Groups are meant to meet regularly and continue for a period of time, multiple touches in order to grow in that primary journey of discipleship.

If you've ever disciplined somebody or have been disciplined by another in a one-on-one, two-on-one situation, it's over time. John Calvin said, "Sometimes God's grace pours out suddenly on some, and sometimes God's grace flows out, drop by drop on others." And that's up to him.

So the message about healing the blind leads to a climax here in this chapter of who Jesus is. He is the Messiah. He fulfills every prophecy of the Messiah. I want to read one of many scriptures because associating anything with the blind being able to see should make us think about the work and power of the Messiah.

In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see. Once more the humble will rejoice in the Lord; the needy will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. Isaiah 29:18-19

So another lesson for us in this is we may and should probably expect to need repeated touches by Jesus to see clearly. For those who want to see clearly, we may need a second, third, or fourth touch. We need touches the rest of our lives so we can continue to be formed by God. We need touches for the rest of our lives so that we can continue to impact the world that needs to see hope. The world that lives in darkness sees the violence and wonders where the answer is to the violence; they see the brokenness and wonder where the answers are to the brokenness.

A favorite passage to help me see clearly where God wants me to focus is Micah 6:8. "*He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*" Maybe your spiritual world is out of focus. Maybe you're saying, "When I try to look at Jesus, I see a man that looks like a tree walking around. I don't see clearly. It's blurry to me."

What the man in our story saw when he saw the trees was unnatural. And when we are not healed, we don't see clearly. It is a danger for us that what is unnatural can become natural. What is unacceptable becomes acceptable because we don't see clearly. We've lost sight of what the truth is, and what seems to be playing out in our world seems so unnatural, but the world views it as natural. Our world needs a healing touch from Jesus. It doesn't see clearly or understand what is good, what is true, and what is just. And that's why our vision here at CPC is for us to get equipped to become transformed people, transforming the peninsula.

"Jesus sent him home, saying, 'Don't even go into the village'" (v. 26). Now, I won't give away what happens next, but by instructing the healed man not to go back to the village, it gives Jesus and his disciples time to get out of the area to go 27 miles north to a place called Caesarea Philippi. A place Kevin is excited to teach us about next week.

Jesus promised us that our spiritual vision can get better here on Earth. Our spiritual vision will never be 20/20 on Earth, but we

have a promise that our spiritual vision will become 20/20 when we get to heaven. But don't give up on the improvement here. We can have our eyes corrected here as well.

In fact, I love how Paul states it. "*For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known*" (1 Corinthians 13:12). Our story today is a miracle, but it's also an illustration. It's an illustration that explains that we have the capacity to see more clearly and understand the riches of God more and more. I want to give us a couple of kind of application thoughts we can think about during the week.

First, never assume that because we see some things clearly, and we do, that we see all things clearly. We need to be humble. This requires humility to realize this. Remember, we see a poor reflection in the mirror, but the time will come when we will see Jesus as he is. I love 1 John 3:1-3.

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure. 1 John 3:1-3

Until then, let's be humble enough to recognize the things we do not see and understand and see this as a journey to continue to grow in him, to see life as an adventure, an experienced discovery. We have that to look forward to for the rest of our days.

Second, be patient with others who do not see clearly what we think they should see clearly. Sincere believers in Christ from all areas who are seeking to follow him will sometimes understand various things differently. And we need to be patient with one another. We need to always seek to see more clearly, but be willing to learn from those who disagree with us. Because if we only learn from those who agree with us, how will we ever correct any of our misunderstandings? We all have blind spots.

Third, be encouraged that your mission is to bring people to Jesus so he can lead people to see clearly. There is no evidence in this story at all that this blind man had a big part in his healing. He was brought to Jesus by his friends. His friends begged Jesus to heal him. It never indicates that this man even asked for a healing. The friends were right there. They loved this man, brought him to Jesus, and prayed for his healing. But there comes the point when this man, apart from his friends, had to be willing to be led by Jesus.

So it's our mission to bring people to where they can intersect with Jesus. We pray for them, but then we need to let them go. And I know how hard that is, what a struggle that is, how scary for us that is. But we have to let go of our loved ones and trust

God. We can point the way out of the darkness, but we have to let them go. Let them go into the hands of God because he's the one that will make them see clearly.

And finally, there's no seeing clearly at all without first seeing the cross of Christ. We live in extraordinary times. What we know is right is now seen as wrong, seen as wrong by many who are in positions of power and authority. And what we know to be wrong, we hear others articulate as being right. The people we love are being bombarded with lies and deceptions. The world blurs things; the flesh blurs things. The devil seems to be more empowered in our world, and it's as if he grows stronger and feeds on the lies and the deceptions and the immorality and the violence in our culture.

The world attempts to cache, dim the light, blur images, confusing us so we don't see clearly. But thankfully there's hope in these extraordinary times. We have the capacity to see more clearly because first, we have the scriptures, we have the truth, the eternal truth of God. And second, we have the Holy Spirit who resides in us. To bring us the message of the scriptures, to enliven the message of the scriptures in our hearts. The cross of Christ gives us clarity.

Love is real. Sacrifice is real. Forgiveness is real. Grace is real. Mercy is real. Acceptance is real. His church is real. The resurrection is real. Heaven is real.

In these extraordinary times, we need God. We need to recognize the promise that we have been given, the capacity to bring light into darkness, the capacity to bring the glory of God into blurry situations. Jesus Christ restores our spiritual vision, and then he places us on this lifelong journey called transformation.

And we can approach this journey of transformation with a negative feeling, with this feeling of, "I'm going to fail." Or we can approach it from a position of adventure and wandering. "Hey, if I fail, if I fall my face, he's going to pick me right up again." So let's not retreat from this journey that he has us on to see him more clearly. A journey of learning, discerning, and repenting. A journey where we experience his grace, forgiveness, and mercy, to see what matters most to God and follow him more closely. I love Psalm 119:8, where the psalmist says, "*Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.*"

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

© 2023 Central Peninsula Church, Foster City, CA
Catalog No. 1469-23FC

This message from Scripture was preached on Sunday, January 29, 2023 at Central Peninsula Church.

www.cpc.org