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# Not Blind but not Seeing

Mark 8:15-9:1<sup>1</sup>

*Pastor Russ Kennedy*

“I don’t understand...” “What does this mean...” “We just don’t get that...” “I struggle to see how that applies...” “Why is this so hard for me...” We have all said things like this. Sometimes we just don’t get what is going on in the Bible, with church, in our situations.

Mark helps us with that. We are picking up in the middle of things. This story has a back story.

There has been the fullness of Jesus’ provision in the miraculous feeding of the 4,000.

There has been the blindness of Jesus’ enemies in the demand for a sign. **Mark 8:11–13**

<sup>11</sup> The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him. <sup>12</sup> 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.” <sup>13</sup> And he left them, got into the boat again, and went to the other side.

So are we to expect of Jesus’ followers?

There are two ways to get something across to people. You can just tell them. You can in quick short sentences what is going on with the disciples, with people to whom this is written and ultimately with us.

Of you can show them. This is what Mark has chosen to do. Through the movement of the story, we are being shown something very important. Now, it is usually easier to simply be told something. But God has chosen, all through the Bible, to show us things through the words and deeds of people. He has given us stories. And now we a set of three scenes, closely connected, all designed to show us something.

Let’s listen to these, think about them together and see what God is saying about us, to us.

## **The Probing Evaluation**

**(v.14-21)**

<sup>14</sup> Now they had forgotten to bring bread, and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. <sup>15</sup> And he cautioned them, saying, “Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.” <sup>16</sup> And they began discussing with one another the fact that they had no bread. <sup>17</sup> 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? <sup>18</sup> Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember? <sup>19</sup> 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.” <sup>20</sup> “And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?” And they said to him, “Seven.” <sup>21</sup> And he said to them, “Do you not yet understand?”

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Mark is also showing us why it is that people who follow Jesus just don't get it. The disciples are involved in both the miracle of the feeding and the confrontation by the Pharisees. Jesus has shown them how He is the bread of life and the Pharisees cynically want another sign. Yet the disciples are confused. So they are experiencing both the heat (the problem of feeding so many in a desolate place) and the dew (God's miraculous provision of food). In the midst of this they are focused on their failure to bring bread.

### **A Pointed Warning**

Watch out for the Pharisees' leaven. Meaning, watch out for the Pharisees way of corrupting God's Word and ways. Jesus' confrontation only exposes what they were thinking in their hearts and the discussion among themselves. They see Jesus' confrontation in terms of what they had failed to do. The situation of the feeding is supposed to teach that Jesus provides the true bread from heaven. The Pharisees and Herod see bread as a means to power.

### **A Penetrating Dialog**

I love Jesus' way of using questions. The disciples think that Jesus is referring to their ineptness and forgetfulness. They know Jesus is implying something. They just make the wrong assumption

### **A Probing Question**

Jesus' confrontation provides a true interpretation. It is not that they are ignorant – it is that they are hard of heart (v.17-18). Blindness is a matter of lostness (1 Corinthians 2:14; 2 Corinthians 4:3-5). But for disciples, near sightedness is a matter of heart hardness. Jesus points them back to Jeremiah 5:21. The larger context of Jeremiah addresses a people who have forsaken God to serve idols, rendering them senseless, foolish, unable to see, hear, or to fear and tremble before God's face. The underlying cause is rooted in a stubborn and rebellious heart (v.23) that does not speak words of truth to itself (v.24) with the resulting chastening that follows (v.25). Jesus' probing questions in verses 18-21 are meant to expose the heart. "Do you not yet understand?" No, in fact they don't

Have you ever said this when talking with someone? Don't you understand it yet? Can't you see? Don't you get this? Have you ever said it to yourself?

## **The Living Object Lesson**

**(v.22-26)**

The miracle that follows in this paragraph is to a living object lesson to the disciples. He has just challenged them about their sight, now He illustrates for them what this means.

<sup>22</sup> And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. <sup>23</sup> 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?" <sup>24</sup> And he looked up and said, "I see people, but they look like trees, walking." <sup>25</sup> Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. <sup>26</sup> And he sent him to his home, saying, "Do not even enter the village."

### **A Significant Setting**

**(v. 22-23)**

They come to a village Jesus has often visited. The people know him there and so bring him a blind man. But the miracle Jesus is about to do is not for the eyes and ears of the villagers. He leads the blind man outside the village and afterward forbids him to return.

## A Surprising Miracle

(v. 24-25)

<sup>23</sup> ...when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, “Do you see anything?” <sup>24</sup> And he looked up and said, “I see people, but they look like trees, walking.” <sup>25</sup> Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.

What has just happened? What are we to understand here? I think it is simply that like the disciples, God’s people are not blind, but sometimes don’t see clearly.

How do I get this? Simply by asking two questions: How is this paragraph part of its context? Why a two stage healing? Mark shows us the disciples who are like the first and will become like the second. Jesus’ initial act of healing restores his sight. The key is in verses 23-24. “Do you see anything? Yes, I see men like trees walking around.” So he is not blind, but he does not see clearly. This is exactly the case of the disciples. They are not blind – they are disciples. But they do not see. And Mark is going to give us further demonstrations over the next 2 chapters that though the disciples are not blind, they really do not see.

This is the case with us as well. Some people who come to church are just blind and need to be brought to Christ for salvation. But most are not blind, but like this man, they see men as trees walking – they see life through blurred vision and confused images. Not blind, but don’t see. The disciples who are watching this are supposed to learn something. Christians, to whom this text comes, whether in the early church or to us now, we are to learn as well.

Now we have a great advantage the disciples did not. They did not yet have the experience and explanation of the cross and resurrection and indwelling of the Spirit that we have. But the original recipients of the gospel of Mark did. And so do we. Yet in spite of that, we sometimes do not see as clearly as we do.

Now, this text is not primarily about a blind man and near-sighted disciples. This is about Jesus. He provides the bread that gives life. He warns against error that destroys. He heals the blind and makes the near-sighted see clearly. Without Jesus, this text is meaningless and empty.

## The Stunning Illustration

(v.27-33)

In a conversation along the way we find what the disciples do not understand, do not see clearly. Mark gives us a stunning illustration of how Jesus’ followers can be not blind, but not see clearly.

<sup>27</sup> 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?” <sup>28</sup> And they told him, “John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.” <sup>29</sup> And he asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Christ.” <sup>30</sup> And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him.

<sup>31</sup> 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. <sup>32</sup> And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup> 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.”

The interaction between Peter and Jesus shows that it is hardness of heart that causes us to not see the importance of God’s agenda.

**A Striking Confession****(v. 27-30)**

Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah (v.27-30). The people see Jesus in terms of the Old Testament, but not as the Lord, the Messiah. But Peter, speaking for the disciples, confesses His understanding that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament Messiah. Jesus is deity. Jesus is the promised King. So the disciples are not blind.

**An Unexpected Teaching****(v. 31)**

The gospel of Mark is about the Servant King. Now we will find out what is the agenda for Jesus' life. It is about being recognized as the Messiah. He is sovereign servant. But He is also the saving servant. As such, He must die. Now, this is not just any death. It is not the prettied up symbols we wear in gold or silver or decorate our homes and gathering places. No, what Jesus says is that He is going to be taken and put in the electric chair. He is going to be executed through the most barbarous, cruel, painful means of execution ever devised.

**A Shocking Correction****(v. 32-33)**

And Peter, probably speaking for all the disciples again, is freaked out. He has acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah, the King. Now he turns right around and rejects God's agenda of the cross. So he sees as trees walking—he sees in blurred vision and confused images. Not, he is not blind but he sure does not yet see. It is interesting that Jesus sees behind Peter's confusion Satan's work. He aims for Peter's heart and mind, which is pursuing man's interests instead of God's agenda.

We will find this ever to be so. We ourselves will often have strong and true and commendable affirmations of faith. And at the same time our minds, which are set on earthly things, reject God's agenda, in particular His agenda for the cross and self-denial and sacrifice

Where do I get that? Look at what comes next!

**The Sobering Confrontation****(v.34-38)**

The summoning of the crowd levels the playing field. What he is about to say is not just for disciples, it is for the crowd as well.

<sup>34</sup> 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. <sup>35</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. <sup>36</sup> For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? <sup>37</sup> For what can a man give in return for his soul? <sup>38</sup> 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."

**An Unmistakable Call****(v. 34-35)**

The challenge to not seeing and its great solution is *the cross*. Jesus' claim and call is unmistakable. To pursue Christ means taking up the cross and following Him. So when we are faced with both the blind and those who see men as trees walking, bring the cross to them and bring them to the cross. Call them to the cross.

**A Worthless Exchange****(v. 36-37)**

The cross way of life is rejected when we do not value the eternal things. These penetrating questions give us the sight to clearly see what we too often value. What will you gain if... What will it profit you when... What have you traded for...

Jesus did none of these things. He gave up his life, He went to the cross, He did so for the gospel. He did so for the good news that those who confess the cross and the crown, not just with words, but in a way that transforms the life, will in fact truly live.

For moderns, the cross challenges these categories of self-focus and psychological refuge:

v.35	Saving and losing life	Self-preservation
v.36	Profit and gain	Self-sufficiency
v.37	Exchange for soul (self)	Self-determination
v. 38	Ashamed of Christ	Self-actualization

We must come to Christ and accept the cross way living. That call must be clear and unmistakable. When people are blind, bring them to the cross for salvation. When saved people can't see, don't understand out of hard-hearts, bring them to the cross.

I am convinced that in this day this is where we fail the most. We are people who want relief from the consequences of our sin, who are looking to serve our agenda in the midst of the situations and issues of life, who are thinking about life and its pain, problems, joys and struggles – we must take up the cross, to die to self, to stop trading eternal things for the worthless trinkets of the world, to stop pursuing lesser loves than love for God, to stop serving heart idols and turn to serve the living God with unashamed courage until the glory of His appearing.

### **The Key Issue**

**(v. 38)**

For... are you ashamed of Jesus?

Now, Jesus does not have in mind and Mark is not talking about witnessing here. The context doesn't drive us that way. What the original Jewish and Gentile audience would have heard would sound like this: "Are you ashamed of a Servant-King who died a criminal's death?" Does the Roman version of the electric chair shock you so that you will change the gospel? If so, if you are seeking salvation by any other way, if you seeking to live as a Christian any other way, Jesus is ashamed of you. Plain and simple.

And just in case we miss the core issue, Mark's transition chapter 9:1 reminds us of the core issue of seeing by faith.

<sup>1</sup> And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power."

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## Reflect and Respond

We tend to be consumed with the problems, failures, pains and feelings in the experiences of life. We must learn to interpret life through Biblical models, analogies and metaphors. Not having bread was a problem. But being vulnerable to the leavening error of legalism because of having hard hearts with dim and muddled vision and agenda rejecting soul pursuits is ever so much more dangerous to the well-being of believers.

We often have hard hearts. Because we are believers, we are not totally blind. But because of our hard hearts, we do not see clearly. We are not blind, but they do not see.

Disciples of Jesus can struggle with faith. We may both affirm truth that will save us and yet seemingly reject truth designed to transform us. You who are absolutely sure that you are Christians do not doubt God and His Word for your life's problems and sin solutions.

We tend to reject God's agenda for us. Your hard, self-serving, idol worshipping and pursuing hearts will tend to reject God's agenda for your life situations and what is required to be pleasing to God. Be on guard lest you avoid the implications of the cross and self-denial for yourself, your heart pursuits and life situations.

We must all be brought to the cross. The cross-centered life is not just for some higher level Christians. Taking up the cross is not a beautiful thing. It is a painful, bloody, dying kind of thing. And if you are embarrassed about that kind of Christian life, then you are an embarrassment to Jesus.

Are you not blind but not seeing?

Come to Jesus now you who are blind and may He heal your soul and give you eyes to see.

Come to Jesus now you who see but with near-sighted, dim lit eyes and may He wash your heart with His Spirit so that you will see clearly.