

## Message #27

## Mark 8:22-26

We come now to one of the oddest miracles ever performed by Jesus Christ. As one writer said, this is a “curious event.” In fact, there are three odd things about it:

- 1) This miracle only shows up in Mark. So it apparently affected Peter. He is relaying this story to Mark.
- 2) This is the only miracle Jesus performs in stages—this is a two-stage healing miracle. Now we know having tracked Jesus Christ and His miracles through this book that:
  - A) He could heal at once without healing in two phases or stages
  - B) This case was certainly not too hard for Jesus to solve
  - C) **This miracle must have been designed to teach His non-seeing disciples a lesson.**
- 3) This is the only place where Jesus actually spits on someone.

Now we must assume because of the conjunction “and” that begins **verse 22**, that it is sequentially connected to the preceding context in which Jesus basically told His disciples, you don’t understand (**v. 21**) and you have eyes but you don’t see (**v. 18**). They still had not figured out that Jesus Christ was the God/Savior/Messiah/King. They could not see it, so this odd miracle is performed by Christ to show them this. In fact, this miracle is performed just before Jesus asks them who they think He is.

Although there are some wonderful things we will see in analyzing this miracle, the primary point is this:

**IN ORDER FOR ANYONE TO SEE GOD’S TRUTH CLEARLY, ONE NEEDS TO HAVE A PRIVATE AND PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST OVER A PROCESS OF TIME THAT TOTALLY BELIEVES IN HIM AND IS WILLING TO LET HIM LEAD.**

In Isaiah 35:5-6 it is predicted that when the Messiah would come to establish a Kingdom for Israel, “the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped then the lame will leap like a deer and the tongue of the dumb will shout for joy...”

When Jesus came to this world, He did that for hundreds, if not thousands of people. As a result, they should have recognized Him and honored Him as the Messiah and King. Had they done that, the other things predicted by Isaiah and other prophets such as the land blessings and the national blessings would have also been fulfilled.

Of course, the main problem was in order for them to experience these Millennial blessings, they would need to admit they were sinners who did not have the righteousness needed to get into the Kingdom. They would have needed to admit that they needed forgiveness that could only be found in the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ and to this day most of Israel refuses to admit this.

Now as we come to this text, Jesus is wrapping up His Galilean ministry. He has done some incredible things in Galilee. **Verse 22** says they came to Bethsaida. Bethsaida was the general area where Jesus fed thousands of people with five loaves and two fish. Bethsaida was a Galilean town.

It was a relatively small town, kind of like a village; but it was called a “city.” Mark calls it a village and Luke calls it a city. We have already mentioned some of the things that were done in this area. Matthew informs us that Jesus had done incredible miracles in this very place (Matt. 11:21). So the boat came back to the NE shore of the Sea of Galilee to a town located just east of the Jordan River, where it flows into the sea. This was Bethsaida Julius where the feeding miracle had occurred (Luke 9:10). Bethsaida is a town that means “house of fishing.”

This town was apparently the hometown of three of Jesus’ disciples—Peter, Andrew and Philip (John 1:44; 12:21). When He gets back, there are five details given as to what happened.

**DETAIL #1** – They brought a blind man to Jesus. **8:22b**

Often times the idea of being blind and having sight is a metaphorical picture for seeing or understanding or not seeing or not understanding spiritual truth (i.e. 8:17, 18, 21). This is key to unraveling this very text. **No one will ever see truth or understand truth without a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.**

When Jesus came to Bethsaida, some of the townspeople brought him a blind man that they wanted Jesus to heal. All throughout this book of Mark we have seen people beg Jesus to heal them (1:40; 5:23; 6:56; 7:32). **People recognized Jesus as a great healer; but they do not recognize Him as the sin-saving Savior or a spiritual sight-giving Creator.**

The blind man may not have actually lived in Bethsaida, but he apparently did have a home somewhere in the vicinity (**8:26**). There is no question that people believed Jesus could miraculously heal; but they did not believe He could spiritually save nor did they believe that they needed to be spiritually saved.

**DETAIL #2** – They beg Christ to touch him. **8:22c**

These people knew that a physical touch from Jesus could heal people. But carefully notice it is not the man who is begging Jesus, it is his friends. His friends are begging Jesus to heal this blind man and the man is not asking himself. In fact, we suspect that he may have been somewhat of a proud man, who didn’t want to humble himself to ask Jesus Christ for salvation.

George Shearing was born blind and became a famous blind jazz pianist (1911-2011). He wrote more than 300 pieces of music and his most famous song was “Lullaby of Birdland.” He always wore dark glasses and had a white cane. One time Shearing was in a big city on a corner and a man standing next to him said, “Excuse me sir, would you mind helping a blind man cross the street?” Well Shearing was about to tell the man that he was blind too, but his pride got the best of him and he decided to give it a shot. He said to the man “Certainly my friend. Here, take my arm.” Shearing said they started to cross the street and he was hearing all kinds of unnerving sounds. He heard tires squealing; horns honking; cab drivers yelling. But they finally made it. Shearing said, “I’ll never do it again, but it was the biggest thrill of my life.” He was too proud to admit he was blind and needed help himself.

Also what is interesting is that these people beg Christ for physical healing for a friend, but they do not beg Him for spiritual salvation from their sins. This group wanted what Christ could give them physically but not what He could do for them spiritually.

**DETAIL #3** – Jesus takes the blind man out of the village. **8:23a**

Don't overlook this, they have just asked Jesus to touch the man (**v. 22**); and **verse 23** says He did; but nothing seems to happen.

Jesus takes this man by the hand out away from the people. Obviously the blind man could not follow Christ on his own, so Christ leads him by the hand. This is a beautiful picture of what Jesus Christ does. He takes people who are blind and leads them to the point that they can see. This is the point He wants His own disciples to see.

That must have seemed to be somewhat peculiar because He had certainly performed many public miracles. But what we have here is that Jesus is taking someone by the hand who has not even asked Him to heal him.

Jesus apparently separates Himself and this man from the rest of the town's people, plus it is possible that He did not even let His disciples go with Him. His disciples were still somewhat disbelieving in spite of all they had seen Him do. They still did not understand (**8:21**). **So this becomes a visual lesson which teaches that it is a personal relationship with Me that is critical to your ability to see truth.**

When Jesus had fed the thousands in this very area, the disciple's heart was hardened (6:52). They were still stumbling around in their faith. When He walked on the water to them in the boat right after this miracle, they thought He was some phantom spirit-being (6:49). They have spent hours and days and months and years with Jesus Christ and his own disciples still do not understand.

Now it has been debated as to why Jesus took the man away alone:

- 1) Some suggest He wants to get away from a crowd of people who would chase Him for cures.
- 2) Some suggest He was interested in this man personally and took him away from the crowds to show an individual and personal interest in sinners.
- 3) Some suggest this is due to the fact that Jesus is through with Bethsaida.

Matthew tells us that Jesus had pronounced a horrible abandonment judgment on Bethsaida (Matt. 11:22). Jesus actually pronounced a "woe" judgment on this city because these people would not repent of their sin and believe on Him in spite of all the miracles He had performed.

As a result of this, Jesus was not about to do one more miracle inside the city limits for these people to see. He was done with this group. In fact, He will not even sanction anymore witness of Himself in this town (**v. 26**). Apparently some of these people who brought this man to Jesus were those who had rejected Him as Savior, so He would not let them be near Him and see Him do wonderful things.

4) Some suggest that the crowd that wanted to make Him King would get revved up again.

Now we may recall that this was the group who wanted to make Jesus King by force after the feeding of the 5000 (John 6:15). They did not want to admit they were sinners, but they sure liked the idea of getting physical things from Christ.

I find it interesting that people say we need to follow the teachings of Jesus. Well Jesus walked away from places and told people that because of their rejection of Him they would go to hell. He had no problem informing them that they were heading to condemnation.

**DETAIL #4** – Jesus heals this blind man in two phases. **8:23b-25**

This is a most unusual healing miracle. Jesus could have just commanded that the blind man see and he would have seen. But this is peculiar in that Jesus uses a twofold process to bring about his sight. We think Jesus does this specifically for several reasons.

**Phase #1** - Jesus spits on the man's eyes and lays His hands on the man's eyes. **8:23**

When you first read this, it seems somewhat gross. How is it possible for the spray of spit to heal some diseased eyeballs? If any other person on this earth did this, it would be gross. In fact, it probably would start a fight.

But this is Jesus, who is God, who is doing this and it shows His power to give life. Everything about the Person of Jesus Christ is Deity, even His spit. Even His spit can do the miraculous. We saw in Mark 7:33 that He used His saliva to heal a man who could not speak.

I am going to make an assumption here about this man. He may have been a proud man who was too proud to ask Jesus for healing himself. So this could have been part of the humbling process. Let's face it; it is not the norm for some person to spit in your face.

It is a very rare moment when Jesus uses His spit to heal a blind man. He does it here and He used spit to form mud in John 9:6 in another healing of another blind man.

Jesus spit on his eyes or literally in Greek, "into his eyes" and laid His hands on the man and asked him if he saw anything.

Now there are three different Greek words in **verse 24** used here that all have to do with vision:

- 1) "looked up" – look up in a way that begins to recover sight (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 27)
- 2) "see men"- to begin to see something in a way that begins a vague discernment (*Ibid.*, p. 83)
- 3) "see like trees"- to begin to see and perceive, to personally behold and experience (*Ibid.*, p. 321)

By using these words it clearly shows us that this man was beginning to see, but it was a process connected to Jesus Christ.

**Verse 24** says the man looked up and said he saw men walking around like trees.

Now there are some things to think about here. First of all, trees don't walk. So what we suspect is that his vision is somewhat blurry and he sees what looks like tall men walking around as tall as trees.

If you look at a bunch of people and they look like a bunch of trees, you aren't truly focused right.

This is a purposeful partial healing that really leads to what Kent Hughes said were "electrifying" results (*Mark*, p. 192).

However, secondly, for the first time this man started to see something. He was beginning to see movement and color and light and shadows. This must have truly whetted the appetite of this man that Jesus could really make him see.

When we first are touched by Jesus Christ, things are out of focus. But as we continue in our relationship with Jesus Christ and an understanding of His Word, we can begin to see things clearly.

I don't think this is a coincidence. This fact illustrates many things. A faith that sees clearly is a gradual process, not an instant moment. Once one is touched by Jesus Christ the door is opened to see wonderful things, but it does not happen all at once. We who believe in Christ still see in a mirror darkly, but one day we will see all clearly.

**Phase #2** - Jesus laid His hands on the man's eyes and his vision was restored to see everything clearly. **8:25**

The text says, "he looked intently" which means his eyes are wide open. The text also says, "he saw everything clearly" which means he saw everything clearly from far away. Obviously his vision was completely cured. Over a period of time, one begins to see truth clearly and understand the Word of God with clear focus and sight.

Now the obvious question is why a two-phase healing? We must realize that these miracles are designed to teach spiritual realities. They do establish His credentials, but they also teach much more than this.

1) To teach that one really needs to believe in Jesus Christ in order to see God's truth.

Remember the context is an unbelieving group in Bethsaida and an unbelieving group of disciples. If you don't believe Jesus is the God/Savior/Messiah/King, you will not see God do much of anything.

God has built into His program with humanity that everything He does is based on faith. You cannot be saved without faith in Jesus Christ and you will not see God do much of anything without faith. In fact, in Hebrews 11 we learn that “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Heb. 11:6).

People who believe the Word of God and have faith in Jesus Christ and in what God says will see God do some amazing things. Jesus is in a city of Bethsaida that has rejected Him.

He performed some amazing miracles in this city and they rejected Him as Savior, which is why He pronounced a “woe” judgment on them (Matt. 11:21).

God works in harmony with people who have faith in Him and His Word and so Jesus is in an area where they don’t and therefore it was hard for God to do any miracle in view of faithless people. The same problem existed in Nazareth. Mark says, “He could do no miracle there” (Mark 6:5). God can’t work and won’t work with people who don’t believe in Him.

This is why this particular miracle required two phases. One touch of Jesus Christ was not enough; there needed to be two touches because of the lack of faith.

2) To teach that the ability to see clearly is a process which comes as we develop in our personal relationship with the Lord over time.

Having real spiritual sight is a process that takes time. Understanding the Word of God and the will of God is not an instant reality. Seeing and understanding God’s Word clearly does take time.

3) To show that God actually does heal some people over a process of time. People who are sick need to realize that they need to stay faithful to God and heed medical counsel. If it is God’s will to heal, it may take some time, but during that time one should cultivate a close relationship with Christ and carefully listen to His Word.

4) To teach that there is a difference between the first coming and second coming of Christ.

It will take two miraculous comings of Jesus Christ before the whole world will acknowledge who He actually is. They don’t see it or get it the first time.

The first touch illustrated that these people had an inadequate view of Jesus Christ. They did not see who He was clearly.

The first time Jesus Christ came to this earth, they did not see His identity clearly. The next time He comes to this earth, they will all see it and get it.

Jesus was seen as a giant among men, but not as the God Savior.

**DETAIL #5** – Jesus sent the blind man home and would not let him go to Bethsaida. **8:26**

Had this man gone back to the city and shown how he now had his eyesight, the crowds would again want to make Jesus King by force. But they do not want to make Him their Savior from sins.

Now Bethsaida was not some major city where you could just disappear in the crowds. Jesus was done giving Bethsaida chances to get right with Him. He was through.

This is one sober text. It is possible to have seen God do some powerful things. You may have been around the Christian action and seen a lot. That is the story of Bethsaida. But seeing a lot and personally believing in Jesus Christ are two different things.

Mark would later bring out that people would spit in His face (Mark 10:34; 14:65; 15:19).

Jesus Christ is the God/Savior/Messiah/King and He is the only one who can save you from your sins. Will you ask Him to save you right now?