

Lord, Open My Eyes

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Bible Text: Mark 8:22-38

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I want to read just a few verses from the gospel of Mark chapter eight beginning with verse 22. Here we see a miracle that has to do with the healing of the eyes of the blind man. Mark chapter eight beginning with verse 22, just a short passage.

Hear God's Word.

And they came to Bethsaida. And they brought a blind man to Jesus and implored Him to touch him. Taking the blind man by the hand, He brought him out of the village; and after spitting on his eyes and laying His hands on him, He asked him, "Do you see anything?"

And he looked up and said, "I see men, for I see them like trees, walking around."

Then again He laid His hands on his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored, and began to see everything clearly. And He sent him to his home, saying, "Do not even enter the village."¹

May God be pleased to bless us with the reading of his Word and as we have occasion to look into it. Let's pray.

Father, again, we are grateful that your grace is great and as you said through the apostle Paul your grace is sufficient. And this morning we pray, Father, that we might find your grace to be sufficient in each one of our lives. And may it be, Father, that we find this grace to be sufficient in opening our eyes to see Jesus Christ, who he is and what he has done. Be pleased to bless us here even now in this place through the work of your Holy Spirit we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

As we look forward to the beginning of the New Year, I have a suggestion for you with regard to prayer. It is actually a very simple suggestion and it is this. Pray that God, by the power of his Spirit, will open your eyes to understand who Jesus Christ is and what he came to do. You may want to be praying that he will open your eyes further to this understanding of who Jesus Christ is and what he came to do. At any rate, this is the

¹ Mark 8:22-26.

prayer. Pray that God will open your eyes to a better understanding of who Jesus Christ actually is and what he came to do.

The apostle John tells you and me that if we pray in accordance with his will the Father hears us and answers us.² And I submit to you that the prayer that I am suggesting is a prayer in accordance with the will of God. I say this confidently because it comes out of Scripture; it comes out of this text that I have read to you this morning, this short text having to do with the healing of this blind man.

And as we look at this text this morning I am confident, at least I am hopeful, that you will understand the point that Jesus has in healing this blind man. He wants his disciples and he wants you who are reading about this miracle to understand who he is and what he has come to do. This is the burden of Jesus Christ in performing this miracle.

So what we are going to do is look briefly at the miracle and then we are going to look a little bit at the context, what goes before the miracle and what follows the miracle. We will look at the background and the foreground. And out of this I think you will see the point that God has for you this morning: that you do need to pray in this way, Lord, open my eyes to see Jesus Christ, who he is, and what he has done.

Let's look at this miracle, again, first of all. Mark chapter eight and verses 22 and following. "And they came to Bethsaida. And they brought a blind man to Jesus and implored Him to touch him."³

Bethsaida is a little town on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. It happens to be the home town of Peter the apostle. And it is very likely that we get our information, that Mark gets his information—I should say—from Peter as he writes this gospel. And so it is quite significant that here we are back in the home town of Peter. And as Jesus is there with the disciples, the text says the town's people brought a blind man to Jesus and implored him to touch him, "Just touch him, Lord, just reach out your hand and touch him."

But, "Taking the blind man by the hand, He brought him out of the village."⁴ That is, Jesus brings him out of the village into a quiet place, a place where he can talk just with the blind man. And his disciples are present.

Understand the situation. Jesus has a lesson for his disciples. And so he brings the blind man out of the city and there they are alone, the blind man, the disciples, and Jesus. And what does Jesus do? Well, he takes an unusual step. We probably wouldn't appreciate what Jesus does very much. Verse 23 says, "And after spitting on his eyes..."⁵ You get

² See 1 John 5:14.

³ Mark 8:22.

⁴ Mark 8:23.

⁵ Ibid.

the picture, don't you? "And after spitting on his eyes and laying His hands on him, He asked him, 'Do you see anything?'"⁶

The Lord takes this unusual step of literally spitting in the man's face. Then he lays his hands on him. The Scriptures do not tell us any thing else. But perhaps Jesus makes a pronouncement or utters a prayer to His Father. He then lays his hands on the blind man and asks him the question, "Do you see anything?"⁷

What would you anticipate? Well, of course the blind man would see something.

But in this case the blind man answers, "I see men, for I see them like trees, walking around."⁸

At least the blind man had some conception of what a tree is. He probably had such a conception of trees having felt around a tree or two with his hands. And so he says to the Lord, "I see men like trees. They are just like tree trunks. That's all I see. It is kind of vague vision. It is kind of misty, but I can see a little bit. There is some light coming into my eyes."⁹

Verse 25, "Then again He laid His hands on his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored."¹⁰

Jesus once again lays his hands on the man's eyes and the man looks to see what he can see. He looks intently. He can now see. He can see clearly, the Scriptures tell us.

And then our text tells us, "He sent him to his home, saying, "Do not even enter the village."¹¹ "Do not even enter the village. Just go home now. You don't need to go in the village. Just go home."¹²

Now we immediately understand this is an unusual miracle because the blind man is healed in two stages. Jesus does not simply lay hands on the blind man, and suddenly he can see. No. This is a two stage miracle. And this gets our attention. We don't read about a similar miracle in the Gospels. This is the only one, the only miracle performed by the Lord in two stages. What is going on here? Jesus has a lesson, as I said, for the disciples.

Now when you read a story like this, especially in the gospels and in the narratives—and the gospels are examples of narrative literature—when you read a story like this you ask the question: What is its significance? And this is what I am asking. What is its significance?

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Mark 8:24.

⁹ See Mark 8:24.

¹⁰ Mark 8:25.

¹¹ Mark 8:26.

¹² See Mark 8:26.

And when you ask this question, you are really asking the question, “What does the story have to do with me? What is the lesson I am supposed to learn from this miracle?” Jesus obviously had a lesson for the disciples. And I would say to you that he also has a lesson for you and me.

Well, in order to grasp the significance of this little story, the significance of this two stage miracle, we have to go back and look at some of the context. We must see what is going on in the series of stories that Mark is telling. Mark is trying to get across a point. And he is attempting to relate Jesus’ point for performing the miracle.

So let’s go back to the beginning of chapter eight. If you don’t have your Bible, you can follow along. The beginning of chapter eight:

In those days, when there was again a large crowd and they had nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples and said to them, “I feel compassion for the people because they have remained with Me now three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way; and some of them have come from a great distance.”

And His disciples answered Him, “Where will anyone be able to find enough bread here in this desolate place to satisfy these people?”

And He was asking them, “How many loaves do you have?”

And they said, “Seven.”

And He directed the people to sit down on the ground; and taking the seven loaves, He gave thanks and broke them, and started giving them to His disciples to serve to them, and they served them to the people. They also had a few small fish; and after He had blessed them, He ordered these to be served as well.

And they ate and were satisfied; and they picked up seven large baskets full of what was left over of the broken pieces. About four thousand were there; and He sent them away.¹³

Here is another miracle. It involves seven loaves of bread, a few fish, and 4000 people. All we have to do is reflect on the meals we have had in this last week, during the holiday season, and we know that we have consumed a little more, I would suspect, than seven loaves. And I don’t think there were 4000 around your table; maybe a large family, but not quite that many. This is a miracle. Four thousand fed with seven loaves and a few fish and seven large baskets full were left over; more was left over than when the meal began.

¹³ Mark 8:1-9

Well, let's read on a little bit further.

“And immediately [after this miracle] He entered the boat with His disciples and came to the district of Dalmanutha.”¹⁴

Dalmanutha is on the west side of the Sea of Galilee. It is probable that they took a boat from the north and traveled in the boat across the Sea of Galilee down to the west side, to this area of Dalmanutha. And when they arrived there verse 11 says “The Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him.”¹⁵

This is the religious establishment. And they begin arguing with Jesus and “seeking from Him a sign from heaven, to test Him.”¹⁶ “Do a sign. Do a miracle, Jesus.”

But Jesus had already performed several miracles. We have just read about one of them. The Pharisees should have known about these miracles. In fact, they very likely had already seen some of these miracles. But, again, they are arguing with Jesus and wanting to test him.

Verse 12 says, “Sighing deeply...”¹⁷ And you can feel the exasperation expressed in the sigh. “Sighing deeply in His spirit, He said, ‘Why does this generation seek for a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation.’”¹⁸

As I've said, several signs, several miracles have already been performed by Jesus. But they weren't accepted. They weren't really seen by these people. They weren't understood by the Pharisees. In fact, these miracles were despised by the Pharisees. Why? Jesus had come on the scene and many people were following him.

In the other Gospels, Jesus continues on. He says a little bit more. “No sign shall be given to you except the sign of Jonah.”¹⁹ “As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monsters, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”²⁰

In other words, Jesus was forecasting his resurrection. And Jesus also knows that unless individuals like these Pharisees and individuals like you and me read the Bible and understand the Bible they will not believe in the resurrection from the dead. In another context, Jesus says, “If they don't believe in Moses, if they don't understand what Moses has said, they won't believe if someone comes back from the dead.”²¹ The resurrection is the ultimate sign, you see.

¹⁴ Mark 8:10.

¹⁵ Mark 8:11.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Mark 8:12.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ See Matthew 12:39 Luke 11:29.

²⁰ Matthew 12:40

²¹ See Luke 16:31.

But what you must understand is that these Pharisees, arguing with Jesus, are blind. They are blind as bats flying around in a pitch black cave.

Well, the story goes on. “Leaving them, He again embarked and went away to the other side.”²² That is, they got back in the boat. And they go back up to the north side of the Sea of Galilee. The story continues as Jesus and the disciples are in the boat.

Verse 14, “And they had forgotten to take bread.”²³ The disciples forgot to take bread. “And did not have more than one loaf in the boat with them.”²⁴ So here they are off in the boat again and the disciples are looking at one another, “Where is the bread? We have forgotten to bring bread.”

Verse 15, “And He was giving orders to them, saying, ‘Watch out! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.’”²⁵ In other words, “Don’t be like the Pharisees. Don’t be blind as bats like the Pharisees who don’t understand.”

Verse 16, “They began to discuss with one another the fact that they had no bread.”²⁶ The disciples are not paying any attention to Jesus. Jesus is trying to teach them. They are in the boat and Jesus is trying to teach them. And what are they concerned about?

“Oh, we forgot to bring bread.”

“And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, ‘Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart?’”²⁷

Now I want you to think about this for a moment. Here they are in the boat and they had forgotten to bring bread. And Jesus, knowing what they are talking about says, “What’s the matter with you? Don’t you see? Don’t you get it? Don’t you understand? Don’t you understand who it is that is in the boat with you? The one who manufactured bread and fed 5000 with a few loaves and then fed 4000 with a few loaves? Don’t you see?”

Look at the text again, verses 17-21.

And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? 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 you picked up?”

They said to Him, “Twelve.”

²² Mark 8:13.

²³ Mark 8:14.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Mark 8:15.

²⁶ Mark 8:16.

²⁷ Mark 8:17

“When I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?”

And they said to Him, “Seven.”

And He was saying to them, “Do you not yet understand?”²⁸

“Don’t you see who I am?” he is saying to the disciples.

And then in verse 18, again Jesus says, “Having eyes do you not see? And having ears do you not hear?”²⁹ Jesus is actually quoting from the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel. And if you remember a little bit of the biblical history you remember that Jeremiah was in Jerusalem prophesying the fall of that city. Daniel had already been taken into captivity. Ezekiel had already been taken into captivity and had also been taken into Babylon. And

Jeremiah was saying, “The end has not yet come. The city is going to be destroyed.” And the people of Jerusalem were saying, “Oh, no. God will not destroy his city. God will not do that.” And Jeremiah was responding, “Do you not have ears to hear and eyes to see what has already happened?” The people in Jerusalem were blind.

In like manner, Ezekiel was over in Babylon prophesying to the people who were already in captivity and saying, “Yes, Jerusalem is going to fall.”

And the people who were already in captivity were saying, “Oh, no, God will not do that. God will not do that. God will not take the city and destroy it and destroy his temple. He will never do that. Ezekiel, we don’t believe you.”

And Ezekiel was saying, “Do you not have ears to hear and eyes to see?” The people in captivity were blind.

Now Jesus is saying to the disciples, “You are as blind as the people in Jerusalem were before the city fell. Don’t you see? Don’t you understand? You are as blind as the people who were taken into captivity.”

And then what is the next thing that we read? Verse 22 and following,

And they came to Bethsaida. And they brought a blind man to Jesus and implored Him to touch him. Taking the blind man by the hand, He brought him out of the village; and after spitting on his eyes and laying His hands on him, He asked him, “Do you see anything?”

And he looked up and said, “I see men, for I see them like trees, walking around.”

²⁸ Mark 8: 17-21.

²⁹ Mark 8:18.

Then again He laid His hands on his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored, and began to see everything clearly.³⁰

Immediately after rebuking the disciples for their lack of understanding and their lack of sight, Jesus, coming into Bethsaida, takes this blind man out of the city and with the disciples standing around, heals the blind man.

This is an object lesson for the disciples. They are blind. They haven't seen properly. They haven't gotten the picture of who Jesus actually is: that he is the Son of God, that he is the creator of the world, that he is the one who manufactures bread and multiplies bread. And so we have this little object lesson of healing the blind man.

But wait a minute. Wait a minute. This is a two phased healing. There are two parts to the healing. And so we better look a little bit further at this section of the book of Mark.

We look at what takes place immediately after this miracle. Verse 27,

“Jesus went out, along with His disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi.”³¹

They had been in Bethsaida, now they travel north to Caesarea Philippi. In Caesarea Philippi there are wonderful springs of water. This is the headwaters of the Jordan. And so they go up to Caesarea Philippi. On the way, as they are on the road:

[Jesus] questioned His disciples, saying to them, “Who do people say that I am?”

They told Him, saying, “John the Baptist; and others say Elijah; but others, one of the prophets.”³²

“Oh,” they are saying, “Some say that you are John the Baptist come back to life. Some thing you are Elijah the prophet that has come again. And maybe you are another prophet.” Jesus and the disciples are discussing these things.

Verse 29, “And He continued by questioning them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’”³³

“Very well, others talk about me and offer these opinions, but who do you say that I am? Do you understand who I am?”

And here we get this great confession of the apostle Peter.

Verse 29 again,

³⁰ Mark 8:22-26.

³¹ Mark 8:27.

³² Mark 8:27-28.

³³ Mark 8:29.

“And He continued by questioning them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered and said to Him, ‘You are the Christ.’”³⁴

In Matthew it goes this way. “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”³⁵

“Peter, you are getting it! You are beginning to understand. Your eyes are beginning to open. You have some sight, Peter.”

And Matthew offers this comment or Jesus offers this comment through Matthew, “Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.”³⁶

Who is it that has to open your eyes? It is the Father in heaven. When this takes place with us, we say it is Jesus Christ sitting in heaven. He has to open your eyes. He must open your eyes so that you begin to see who Christ actually is, the very Son of God that came into the world.

Well, so far, so good. Let’s look a little bit further.

Verse 30 says, “He warned them to tell no one about Him.”³⁷

We wonder about a statement like this. Why would Jesus say this? Well, the reason Jesus says this is the disciples are not yet ready to testify fully about Christ. They are not ready yet. Why? Let’s read on.

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 was stating the matter plainly.³⁸

In other words, Jesus now, after Peter makes his confession about who Jesus is that he is the Son of God, that he is the Christ, Jesus now begins to explain that he must go to Jerusalem. He must suffer many things. He must be put to death and he must rise again from the dead.³⁹ In other words, Jesus is beginning to explain to the disciples what he came to do, that he came to die on a cross to pay the penalty due to the sins of people like you and me and like the disciples, that he actually came to accomplish this great work on the cross.

And so after Peter makes the confession, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,”⁴⁰ then Jesus begins to explain to the disciples his work.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Matthew 16:16.

³⁶ Matthew 16:17.

³⁷ Mark 8:30.

³⁸ Mark 8:31-32.

³⁹ See Matthew 8:31.

⁴⁰ Matthew 16:16.

And what is Peter's response?

Verse 32, "And He was stating the matter plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him."⁴¹

It is time for some station identification. If you understand that the person in front of you is the very Son of God, the Messiah, promised of old. If you understand this is the case, do you go up to him and grab him by the shirt and pull him close to you and begin to rebuke him and say, "No way, Jesus. This is not going to take place"?

Jesus responds, verse 33.

"But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's.'"⁴²

"Peter, you do not have a godly mindset. You have a fleshly human mindset. In other words, Peter, you have partial vision. You have gotten half way, but you do not have full sight just yet."

I think it is actually the case that the disciples do not really put all the pieces together until the day of Pentecost when the Spirit of God descends upon them. Then they see clearly. They really see who this Jesus that they have walked with for three years, who ascended into heaven, really is. And at that time they have a perspective on the crucifixion and they receive full vision.

You see, this miracle in Mark chapter eight and verses 22 through 26, this very short passage of Scripture, is an object lesson for the disciples to help them understand the fact that a person can not only be blind, but a person can have partial vision and a person can have full vision.

And the partial vision would involve, "Oh, yes, I see who Jesus is. I accept who Jesus is. He is the Messiah. He is the Son of God. But this death stuff, and this sin stuff, I don't accept that. Oh yes, Jesus is a good moral person and he is a good example for us to follow. But I don't accept that cross message and death for sin."

I say to people like this, and maybe you are in this category this morning, I say to people like this, "You have partial vision. You are like this blind man whom Jesus spit upon and laid his hands upon and then he saw people like trees walking." He saw only partially.

And if you are like this, you accept who Jesus is, but you do not accept the work that he came to do. I submit to you, you have partial vision. This is part of the lesson. And as Jesus puts it very plainly in this text, partial vision is not enough.

⁴¹ Mark 8:32.

⁴² Mark 8:33.

We have got a good friend back in Sterling, Kansas who is in his 90s. And he just had a little fender bender in his car. Why? Eyesight. He is worried about his eyesight. As well he should be, I think, at this stage. Partial vision is not good. Partial vision is not helpful. And partial vision with regard to spiritual matters is especially not helpful.

You need full vision. You need to understand who Jesus is, that he is the very Son of God sent into the world on a mission. And the mission was to suffer many things in Jerusalem, to be crucified, to bear the penalty for the sins of people like you and me and then to rise again from the dead. And, thus, he did.

And so the book of Mark is divided by this miracle in chapter eight. The beginning of the book of Mark has mostly to do with who Jesus is. The end of the book of Mark has mostly to do with what Jesus came to do. And you need eyes to see who Jesus is. You need eyes to see what Jesus came to do. And if by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit the gospel of Mark was written in this way and this miracle is the hinge around which the gospel of Mark swings as an object lesson, Mark is attempting to say to you and to me, "Have eyes to see who Jesus is and what he came to do."

And so I submit to you that to pray that God will give you eyes so that you can see who Jesus is, the very Son of God, and to pray that God will give you eyes to see more thoroughly the work of Jesus Christ, what he came to do, is to pray in accordance with the will of God.

And so this is my exhortation for you on this Lord's Day before the beginning of the New Year. You need to pray and I need to pray for open eyes to see who Jesus is and what he came to do. And without this you are going to walk blindly in this world and you will be in spiritual darkness.

How good light actually is! When someone moves the furniture in your house and the lights are out, this is generally not a happy circumstance. You can easily stub your toe or bruise your shin on a piece of furniture. But when the light goes on and you can see the proper path it is a happy moment. So it is, friends, when the good God of heaven opens your eyes so that you see not only who Jesus is, but what he came to do. When you see that the Son of God died on a cross to pay the penalty for the sins of people like you.

And so you ought to pray:

Lord, open my eyes to see who you are and what you have done.

Let's pray now.

Father, thank you, thank you for this little story in the gospel of Mark. Thank you that this miracle is recorded for us. Thank you that it is a lesson for us and in it we can see its significance for us. That we, too, like those disciples of old, we, too, need eyes to see not only who your son Jesus Christ actually is, but also what he came to do, his Work, his cross work and his resurrection. And so we pray, Father, even now that you would be pleased to open our eyes to see Jesus Christ and who he is and what he has come to do.

And I pray, Father, that over the next days and weeks and months we will make this prayer our prayer. And, Father, I pray that we will be able to look back and be able to say, "Thank you, Lord, thank you, Lord, for opening my eyes."

Hear us, we ask, in the name of Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.