

# Seeing Jesus Clearly - Mark 8

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[ 0 : 00 ] Bibles, it's on page 1011. So if you've got a church Bible that's looking really clean and fresh, then it's the new church Bible and that's on page 1011. If it's the old one, then I don't know what page it's on. It's probably very similar, 1010 or 1012. So Mark chapter 8 verses 22.

They came to Bethsaida and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spat on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, do you see anything? He looked up and said, I see people. They look like trees 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. Jesus sent him home saying, don't even go into the village. Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way, he asked them, who do people say that I am? They replied, some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah and still others, one of the prophets. But what about you? He asked, who do you say that I am? Peter answered, you are the Messiah. Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him. He then began to teach them that the son of man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. Get behind me, Satan, he said. You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns. Then he called the crowd to him, along with his disciples and said, whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it. But whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the son of man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his father's glory with the holy angels. And he said to them, truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God has come with power.

Thank you, Ken. Thank you, Alex. We'll just have a moment of prayer.

[ 3 : 12 ] Heavenly Father, thank you for your precious word. Thank you that through your word we can see and hear your precious son, Jesus.

We ask you that you would bless your word to us this morning, that we may see and hear your blessed son ever more clearly and so form us to be ever more like him in his image.

As for those who do not know your son, we pray that you would bless them with eyes to see and ears to hear him this morning. In the name of your son, we pray. Amen.

Well, for those of you who weren't here last week, I was. And unfortunately, I had a scheduling conflict and I didn't realize I was down to preach this week, not last week. So everybody made sure to say to me, make sure you come back now next week. So I understand it's a very rare privilege for a visiting speaker to be asked to speak again so quickly. So I'm glad that you've honored me in this fashion. So here I am, I suppose, in my other good shirt.

And anyway, so this passage of scripture is one that I suppose when I was young in the faith, I didn't really, especially this opening section with the miracle, I just didn't get what was going on here. It's going to seem to be a bit of a strange one. So let's read through just those first few verses again. I'll read them through and we'll see what happens exactly.

[ 4 : 44 ] We'll just get a crisp grip on this scene again. So the disciples, they came to Bethsaida and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he spat on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, do you see anything? He looked up and said, I see people and are they trees walking around? Once more, Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes and when his eyes were opened, the sight was restored and he saw everything clearly. And Jesus sent him home saying, don't even go into the village. Well, just to kind of give you a grip of where I'm coming from, Rachel and I actually were recently in Killarney and we stayed in a B&B; that we like. It's kind of near the town centre and it's not the most glamorous place in the world, but it's clean and pretty well appointed. And we enjoy chats with the hosts who are very nice people and very down to earth. And during our last visit, they told us an interesting story. And as you know, anyone who's been to Kerry knows that all the stories you hear down there are entirely true.

So apparently, once upon a time, and the host swears by this, there was a church, a local church nearby and they had this depiction of, a stained glass depiction of the Madonna and child. And we've all seen these, right? We're living in formerly Catholic Ireland. You could hardly throw a stone in any village in Ireland without hitting one. So this was a depiction of the Madonna and child, Mary and the infant Jesus.

But there was something different about this little baby Jesus. And specifically, the difference was that this little baby Jesus had a big, black, beautiful beard. So people were kind of amused and confused by this. Nobody knows how this picture came to be there. Nobody knew what the origins of this particular artwork was. And, you know, they were thinking, of course, like this, the artist is clearly trying to say something. He's clearly trying to teach something through this depiction of a bearded infant. You know, people thought it was some sort of metaphor, perhaps. Maybe this was supposed to kind of jar our minds into thinking of Jesus as the eternal Christ and that he was once a baby. Now he's a man and all this kind of thing. There was all sorts of theories and speculations about this. And then one time, apparently, there was a man with some expertise in the area of stained glass and churches and all that sort of a thing. And he decided to take a look for himself because this had become almost a minor draw all on its own. So he approached the image and he looked at it and he considered it for a moment. And then he took a handkerchief out of his pocket and proceeded to wipe away the black marker that some joker could have put there 20 years previously.

And I suppose, really, this, I suppose, is just to illustrate that our imaginations or depictions of Jesus are prone to error. They're so often wrong sometimes. And how we conceive of Jesus and how we think of him is perhaps even vulnerable to deliberate distortion by jokers and charlatans.

Now, it's a silly story. And whether it's true or not, please be true. But questions over who Jesus was were rife at the time of this particular section of Mark's Gospel.

[ 8 : 22 ] Speculation as to who he was was something that people were engaged in. So, if we just go back to our text for a minute, we have this kind of strange miracle, this kind of strange two-stage healing that's taking place.

We have this blind man. And how often do we read of blind people being healed and deaf people being given hearing? But people brought this blind man to Jesus and begged him to touch him, begged him to heal him.

So, Jesus takes him away from the village, away from the crowds. And he touches him and he's given partial sight. And he asks him, do you see anything? And he said, I see people, but they're like trees walking.

That's kind of strange, isn't it? I mean, that's not your typical kind of, how you would conceive of a healing. Here's this blind man, being given partial sight. Then Jesus lays hands on him again.

And this time he's healed completely. He can see perfectly. And, I mean, this is kind of odd. You know, this is kind of a strange, like, when I read this when I was young in the faith, I didn't have a clue what was going on.

[ 9 : 34 ] I mean, you know, your instinct, of course, is to kind of say, well, Jesus obviously meant to do this. He wasn't, like, distracted halfway through or anything like that. But Jesus' miracles were always meant to teach.

There were never, there was nothing incidental about them. Jesus' miracles, and the New Testament words are actually signs and wonders, are very deliberately performed. There was nothing accidental about them.

They all revealed something very important. Jesus' miraculous signs, they point to something. I mean, these astonishing wonders are meant to teach us something. And in this surrounding section of Mark's Gospel, something about Jesus himself, rather like the sight being given to this man, has gradually been revealed to the people.

But there's one other detail here at the end of this story. Once Jesus had healed this man, what did he command him to do? He sent him directly home.

And he told him to keep quiet and to avoid the village. Jesus apparently wanted him to say nothing about this to anyone. At least for the time being.

[ 10 : 49 ] And there's a reason for this. But in a moment, he's actually going to do the same thing again. So we'll take a look at this secret aspect to Jesus' work, and we'll get to the bottom of it in a little bit. But for the time being, let's just read the next few verses.

Verse 27. Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, Who do people say that I am?

They replied, Some say John the Baptist. Others say Elijah. And still others, one of the prophets. But what about you?

Jesus asked, Who do you say that I am? Peter answered, You are the Messiah. And Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

So, after this two-stage healing of the blind man, Jesus journeys on to Caesarea Philippi.

[ 11 : 56 ] And on the way he asks them, Who do people say that I am? And, if we actually had been reading through Mark's Gospel from the beginning, we would have seen that in chapter 6, that there had been speculation about who Jesus was, and we would know what the disciples are about to tell him.

Spike, the speculation as to Jesus' true identity had been rife. I mean, it was obvious to everyone who had heard this man speak, or seen him do his works, that this was not your typical rabbi.

And here, Jesus' disciples pass on the gossip that we would have already read. They tell him that Herod, who had just executed John the Baptist, believed that Jesus was somehow John the Baptist again, kind of, almost kind of come back from the dead to haunt him.

Other people said that he was the returning Elijah, as promised by the prophet Malachi, or perhaps one of the other prophets. In any case, Jesus doesn't let them run down these kind of rabbit trails for too long.

He immediately makes it personal and pointed for each of them. He asks them again, but who do you say that I am? And Peter's next few words, they immediately enter history, don't they?

[ 13 : 14 ] You are the Christ. And he was right. So what was Jesus' response? Was it a congratulation? A pat on the back and a little rolled up diploma from Munster Bible College?

No. Mark says, he strictly charged them to tell no one about him. And there it is again, this command to keep silent about who he was.

It's kind of baffling. You know, as New Testament Christians, 2,000 years on, in being, what I suppose could be categorized as evangelicals, telling people about Jesus is or should be second nature to us.

But here we have Jesus giving explicit commands to keep quiet, keep stum. But he won't keep us in suspense much longer because he immediately starts to reveal something more about himself.

So let's go back to verse 31. He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed, and after three days, rise again.

[ 14 : 29 ] He spoke plainly about this and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter.

Get behind me, Satan, he said. You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns. Now that Peter has identified him, Jesus begins to tell everything to his closest followers.

He now tells them for the first time of the grim fate that lay ahead of them as his, or laid ahead of him as their Messiah.

He gives them the awful news that he was to be rejected by the Jewish establishment and executed like a criminal. And this is too much for Peter.

And now, we begin to see why Jesus had been telling people to keep quiet about him. You see, Peter, almost like our blind man earlier, was gradually beginning to see Jesus for who he really was.

[ 15 : 40 ] And it's almost as if you're looking up at the sky and it's kind of a partially clouded day and then the sun comes out from behind the cloud and it's just too intense. That's where Peter was at. Because Peter, like almost all of his fellow Jews, had expected this all-conquering Messiah.

One who would appear in glory and swat Israel's enemies aside in an overwhelming display of force. But this submission unto death thing just didn't compute.

Didn't work. And Peter was capital O offended by this. and he takes Jesus aside and begins to tell him off.

And Jesus' response is very grave. Get behind me, Satan, he said. You do not have in mind the concerns of God but merely human concerns.

Ouch. I mean, Peter had simply spoken rashly. hadn't he? Peter is famously impulsive.

[ 16 : 52 ] And he just couldn't contain his disbelief that Israel's Messiah could die such a shameful death. Cursed is anyone who hangs on a tree.

And with hindsight, we know, of course, that Jesus was right to rebuke him but to say this, to say, get behind me, Satan. Why would he say that thing?

Well, James says in the third chapter of the epistle that if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.

This is not the wisdom that comes from above but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. And we also read in Luke chapter 4 how when Satan had finished his temptations, he departed Jesus to return at a more opportune time.

And you know, truth be told, many of us, and I would count me as somebody who would probably be on the hot-headed side by nature, are probably more like Peter than we would like to admit.

[ 18 : 06 ] I mean, we would much rather take part in an all-conquering Christianity that allowed all of us to look like spiritual heroes as we accomplished great feats for God in luxurious comfort and, you know, while looking amazing the whole time while doing it, you know, with the Instagram account and the Facebook followers and all the rest of it.

But this is a self-exalting attitude and it does bear a dreadful resemblance to that of the Prince of Darkness. That particular attitude is not healthy. It is not good.

Now, I mean, while our impulses can be for good, Jesus' rebuke of Peter is frightening. And it does show us that our impulses and our instincts and our inclinations can also be much darker spiritually than perhaps we realize.

And this is why Jesus simply could not let people going around yapping excitedly about the arrival of the Messiah. I mean, a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, isn't it?

To have only a partial picture is to have a distorted picture. And this is kind of what is behind what is happening in our text.

[ 19 : 24 ] Jesus is always teaching throughout his ministry with both words and actions. He is both showing and telling who he is. Unlike our blind man earlier, Peter could see a little, but he couldn't really see clearly.

He understood who Jesus was, but he was utterly clueless as to Jesus' mission. And today, remembering our bearded baby from earlier, how many times do we see partial or distorted pictures of Christ around us?

Jesus as just a great teacher. Jesus as merely a great moralist. Jesus as, it would seem, exclusively only our problem solver.

A wise man, a political radical, a Jesus who will heal every disease and solve any problem by spellcasting his name like some magical incantation.

What does Jesus look like in the lives of people who profess him as saviour, but is not, as far as anyone can tell, their Lord? Now, I'm certain that Jesus was quite aware of the speculation surrounding him before he asked that question of his disciples, and at that stage, nobody had clear sight of who Jesus is.

[ 20 : 50 ] They could see partially, but they could not see clearly. this was all part of the plan. Jesus was granting Peter and the other disciples spiritual sight in stages.

And now, in one of the most famous passages in the New Testament, who he is and what this means for their lives and means for ours is going to become crystal clear.

So, following this rather pointed exchange with Peter, Jesus doesn't waste an awkward moment. He uses it to teach his disciples and press the truth home. Let's just look at the next few verses.

Verse 34. Then he called a crowd to him, along with his disciples, and said, whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

for whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world and yet forfeit their soul?

[ 22 : 08 ] Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? This is the crucial moment for us here today, this afternoon, when we start to piece all of this together, because it is here in our text with these words that Jesus starts to give his followers a clearer and clearer vision of who he really is.

And not only that, he was now making this personal for each of them. describing to each one the true cost of following him. First of all, he tells them that his identity as Christ, the Messiah, meant that following him was even more important than their own lives.

I mean, whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels? Serious stuff. Then he goes beyond even this, to say that even if one could acquire the whole world, it would not compare to losing their own soul.

Try and comprehend that for a moment. Jesus is not merely talking about the globe that we're on, but the entire world has always existed from his eternal perspective. All its creatures, all its ages, its aeons, its history and its future, vast as all that is in its breadth and its scale and its scope, it is all as nothing.

When compared to the fate of one human soul before God. That's staggering. Like our stained glass image earlier, the distortion is being wiped away.

[ 23 : 56 ] Like our blind man earlier, Jesus' followers are finally starting to see him with unclouded eyes. In our text, it was Peter who saw him first, but even then, he couldn't make up the whole picture.

Now Jesus is revealing himself to all his followers explicitly, whereas before he had been actively hiding his true identity, and his identity had real consequences for them, and has consequences for us too.

But this begs the question though, why not simply just tell them all this right from the start? I mean, all this speculation about who Jesus is, all this kind of hiding of identities, and gradual revelations, and moving in the shadows, the astonishing miracles, and then the secrecy that came after it.

No wonder people were confused about him. I mean, perhaps you're maybe a bit confused yourself, right? But if you are, your mind has actually been opened up to my point, or rather a subtext of Mark's gospel up to now.

that when people are unable to see Jesus for who he is, they're also unable to hear him clearly. I mean, how many of Jesus' miracles are ones where he grants sight to blind people, hearing to deaf people?

[ 25 : 21 ] How many times has he raised the dead? His works set the stage for his words. Jesus had to show before he could tell.

And now he has just told them that following an apparently doomed Messiah was more important than even their own lives. And this is why he didn't lay the whole truth on them right away.

The consequences for their lives would have been too crushing to bear. Only once they had caught enough glimpses of him, of who he really was, could they then have the confidence in him that was necessary to each bear the individual consequences for following him.

And let's only know in our passage for today that Jesus doesn't just reveal who he is, but also what he had come to do. He was to be the crucified and risen Christ who raises the dead, opens the eyes of the spiritually blind, gives those who are deaf the ability to hear God.

and calls those who confess him as Lord and profess him as saviour to follow him down that same road of cross bearing.

[ 26 : 42 ] I mean, that's a glorious truth, but it's a heavy one. But to return to our text for a moment, back to verse 37, he now makes those words bind on all those who would follow him, not just the disciples present in that moment.

Sorry, verse 38, excuse me. If anyone is ashamed of me and of my words and this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.

Jesus knows that we're tempted to be ashamed of his words. he knows that many of us, me included, especially me, I find it's hard to read even as I speak it, have that tendency to be a little gun shy when an opportunity to share the gospel presents itself.

What sort of feelings do we experience in some of those moments? some people are gifted evangelists, I'm not one of them. I feel the way of this even as I speak to you.

The urge to gloss over the confrontational aspects of the gospel, it can be overwhelming. The urge to skate around the number of issues is very, very powerful.

[ 28 : 15 ] I feel it. I'm sure that on some level we all feel it, but we cannot yield to it. You know, I'm not trying to offend, I'm just simply pointing to what Jesus is saying, or else why would he have said it?

Jesus makes it clear that submission to him will mean that we will endure some degree of disgrace for him. This is where I'm grateful for Connor last week.

that was his first sermon, preaching about wives submitting to husbands and husbands laying down lives for wives.

Not okay in our cultural context. But what is it that is so offensive about Jesus' message?

Well, back in the first chapter of Mark, for one example, what is the message that opens his ministry? There's no need to go there. I'll read it to you. The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand.

[ 29 : 17 ] Repent and believe the gospel. There it is, repentance. That's the problem. As fallen creatures, apart from Christ, as sinful and rebellious humanity, we love our sin.

We, nowadays, identify ourselves by our sin. We don't want to change our minds about sin. Because that's what repentance means.

We want to live apart from Christ, as fallen people, our lives on our terms, deciding for ourselves, our own level of commitment and comfort and so on.

At least that's who I was before I became a Christian. We want to set aside God's law and decide for ourselves what right and wrong are.

And this was the problem in the garden, wasn't it? When you eat that fruit, your eyes shall be opened. You should be like God, knowing good and evil, or in other words, deciding for yourself what good and evil are.

[ 30 : 29 ] And, friends, I don't know everybody here. and if you haven't heard this message of repentance before, we pray you would hear it now.

We pray that you would be given ears to hear it, eyes to see Christ for who he is and where he stands in history as Lord of everything, everything.

Not merely as a wise man, or as we see in so many church buildings, kind of frozen and time as some mutant powerless child on his mother's lap, but as the creator, the king, the messiah, the one who in love and in perfect obedience to his father sought to rescue us from eternal separation from God because of our sin, took the criminal's punishment, which is death, that we all deserve for a rebellion against God.

Jesus is the one who lived a sinless life on our behalf so that he could give us his righteousness. If we would only believe that this was so, see our desperate need, confess our sinfulness and our helplessness before him and submit to him as lord of our lives.

We pray that Jesus opens your ears to hear his word to you today. Dear friend, you need to change your mind about who is right and who is wrong. You need to change your mind about your sin.

[ 32 : 01 ] And that's where the rest of us, the professing believers here, you know, it would be much easier to, you know, to achieve great things for God and have the world on a string as well.

But that's not how it works. And I'm sure, even for those disciples who were there with Jesus, as he said those words, these truths landed on them like a ton of bricks.

But Jesus, however, reminds them and us, it doesn't end there. The ultimate glory is yet to come.

First verse of chapter nine. Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.

Will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power. Jesus is coming back. Next time though, he won't be the submissive servant.

[ 33 : 08 ] Next time though, it won't be a game of shadows. He will be the crowned king of heaven and earth, coming to bring his people to glory and to judge the world.

Next time he won't be merely before me, healing miracles, he will bring about a universal resurrection. And having reminded his disciples of this future event, which is coming, he simply didn't leave them hanging at this point.

The next event immediately after our text is his transfiguration. And he reveals himself in his full glory to his closest followers.

They are given eyes to see him. and given ears to hear the father saying, this is my beloved son.

Listen to him. They miraculously see and hear who Jesus is, perfectly in line with the teaching signs he has been performing throughout his ministry and with the healing of our blind man today.

[ 34 : 16 ] So, how do we hear from Christ today? How do we see him perform his works?

Well, Peter tells us how. Peter, who was sorely rebuked in our passage, tells us how we can do this.

And if you want to turn to 2 Peter 1 16. That's page 12222 in the New Bible.

2 Peter 1 16. For we did not follow cleverly devised stories, only told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

He received honour and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the majestic glory, saying, this is my son whom I love, with him I am well pleased.

[ 35 : 37 ] We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on that sacred mountain. We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place until the day dawns, and the morning star rises in your hearts.

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of scripture came about by a prophet's own interpretation, for prophecy never had its origin in human will, but prophets through human, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Peter is saying, and don't miss this, that we see and hear his works today in in this book, your Bible, which Peter says is something even more certain than seeing the transfiguration occur before your own eyes.

That's astonishing. What a blessing God's word is to us today. We understand that these are heavy truths, but at the same time, our ultimate hope is not just in Christ who was 2,000 years ago.



Our ultimate hope is Christ as he is now, Christ as he will return. We pray that this portion of scripture is a blessing to us today.

[ 37 : 03 ] Amen. Amen. Our closing hymn, I think, is In Christ Alone. In Christ Alone. So we'll sing this together.