

He saw everything clearly

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[0 : 00] Right, the passage that we've looked at is really rather crucial in the development of Mark's Gospel and it's rather crucial in a worrying way which I will come to in due course.

! Because if that's what the Gospel is about, it really puts a shape to the way Gospel proclamation works and what you promise people.

So, for example, is God interested in us having good health? Absolutely, certainly he is. Is God interested in enriching us? He promises to enrich us beyond our wildest dreams.

Is God interested in us being happy? He certainly is interested in us being happy. Is God interested in healing every sickness and disease? Yes, he certainly is. Is God interested in making his people wear crowns and in that sense succeed and be triumphant?

Yes, he is. And then the question is, does he intend that all to happen now? Now, that puts a different light on it. Can we promise people all these things instantly now?

[1 : 30] Is that what the Gospel says? Or is it a little bit more subtle than that? Here's another question. Why should suffering be part of the Christian life?

What could be more off-putting to people than to say, if you become a Christian, one of the things that is bound to happen is that you're going to suffer? That's what Paul said to the early churches. I think that's almost sort of at least shooting ourselves in the foot. But is that a truth that has to be reckoned with somehow?

And here's another question, which invites a considerable answer, which I'm not going to look at the whole of this evening. But what is my relationship to myself? What does the Bible teach about self? Is it about self-fulfillment, self-direction, self-validation? Is it a growing of the self? Well, that's a big question.

[2 : 32] Because a lot of things in this world are about that. Is the Gospel one of them? Why should hope, H-O-P-E, hope, be such a large part of what Christianity has to offer?

Why does Peter say, when people ask you for the reason for the hope that is within you, why does Paul say we rejoice in hope of seeing the glory of God?

Why is it these things are all to do with the future? Why is it that that is such a large, it's not the only thing in the Christian life, but it's a very large part of what Christianity has to offer?

Why should that be the case? And the answers, at least in embryo, are found in these verses. So that's quite important. All of these things are really quite important for what Christianity is about and how you tell people about it.

Okay, so let's look at the passage. It's got lots of surprises. It's actually got more surprises in it than I've been able to cope with in the past week. But surprise is like, well, here's one big surprise.

[3 : 44] Why does it take Jesus two goes to heal this blind man? Now, I looked it up and I think this is the first time he's had to deal with a blind man.

But it does look odd, doesn't it, that Jesus has to have two goes at it. Did you have to have two goes at your driving test? Hmm? More.

Okay, well, we'll draw a veil over that. But if we see two. And let's be honest, the reason that you have two goes at your driving test is that the first time you're not good enough.

Am I right? Am I right? That's what it is, isn't it? The first time you're not good enough. And is that why Jesus has to have two goes at healing this man? The first time he doesn't manage it.

So I think that needs to be answered. Is it lack of competence or lack of something else or what? So that's one... Were you surprised by that when it read it?

[4 : 43] Did you think that's very strange? Because Jesus usually heals like that. And this time he has to have two goes at it. And then let's look a little bit more detail at this bit, at this stage.

So on from there, verse 27, Jesus and his disciples go on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi and he says, Who do people say that I am? Well, this is a good time for him to be asking this because we're sort of halfway through the Gospel.

And it's about time we're getting to some conclusion. So he's seen lots of things, heard lots of things. Let's just see whether you've understood any of it. So first of all, other people, what do they say?

And they say, well, some people say John the Baptist. And other people, I heard them in the cafe the other day, they were saying that he's Elijah. They say, you're Elijah, Lord.

Others talk about the other prophets. And then Jesus rather inconveniently makes it very personal and says, okay, guys, what do you say? Who do you think I am?

[5 : 45] It's a very personal question, isn't it? You know, let's see what you say about this. And Peter, who is often the one to jump in with his feet first, if you see what I mean, he says, you are the Christ.

In another account, it's recorded with a little bit more length. You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus says to him, flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

So you've seen something. You have seen it. And it was a supernatural revelation which enabled you to put all this evidence together and see the picture that you are the Christ.

So tick. You are the Christ. That's correct. And Jesus then, verse 30 says, I don't want you telling people this, which is another surprise.

But Jesus has been saying things like that all the way through. Don't tell anyone. Don't tell anyone. And then he begins to teach them. Okay.

[6 : 56] So this is worth noticing. Verse 31. So he's, Peter has said, you are the Christ. That's my considered opinion. You are the Christ, the King, the Messiah, the anointed one.

And now Jesus begins to teach them. He doesn't use the word Christ. He used the word Son of man. And he says, the Son of man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law.

And that he must be killed. And after three days, rise again. And he spells it out clearly.

He spoke plainly about this. Boldly. Clearly. Uninhibitedly. He said it like it was. And Peter takes him aside and begins to rebuke him.

It's a rather, I don't know, what do you say? It's a sort of, yeah. You can just imagine it, can't you?

[8 : 09] Peter, who jumps in with both feet first, does the same thing again. Lord, let me put you right on this. Let me mark your card for you.

Messiahs don't do that. You've got that all wrong. And Peter's saying, no, Lord, you've got this wrong.

The Messiah is the glorious king. And, no, this suffering and being rejected and killed, presuming you mean what you seem to be meaning.

You've got that all wrong. And then Jesus turns and looks at his disciples and singles out Peter and says, Satan, get behind me.

Get behind me, Satan. You are not thinking God thoughts, but man thoughts. You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.

[9 : 12] So, we get this, Peter contradicts Jesus, and then Jesus stingingly rebukes Peter.

I don't know, do you fancy coming along to a sort of share in prayer time and you say a few things and somebody says to you, you're just thinking like Satan, go away.

You think, well, I'm not particularly encouraged by that. I feel a little dented to be referred to as Satan. Well, I think, you know, it's really just absolute put down, isn't it?

A stinging rebuke. You have, you, and then Jesus follows on from this with this really stark and I think difficult to digest, pronouncement off the back of what's just been happening.

He called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said, if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.

[10 : 22] And Peter had been saying, you don't have to do crosses and things like that. Messiahs don't do that. And Jesus affirms, actually they do. And if you want to follow me, that's the sort of Jesus you're going to have to follow.

If anyone would come after me, you've got to follow the way I'm going. And even though Peter thinks I'm wrong, this is it. You must take up a cross and follow me.

And then he just seems to repeat more or less the same thing, digging the hole deeper each time. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it.

Whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world? That's what Messiahs do, isn't it?

To crowns and glory. What good would it be for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? The very thing that makes him or her, him or her.

[11:28] And what can anyone give in exchange for his soul, his life? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, do you notice the two things together?

It's the me and my words. It's the Jesus who said the things that Jesus says. It's the Jesus who says, I'm going to suffer. That Jesus, that Jesus. If anybody is ashamed of me and my words, because there's no other Jesus than the Jesus who said these things.

If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, well, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he does come in his Father's glory.

Ah, there is glory, yes. There is glory in due course. And when he comes in his Father's glory, if you've been ashamed of this Jesus, this Jesus will be ashamed of you.

And there will be power. And he says, some of you are standing here, will not taste death, before you see the kingdom of God come in power. And that's another surprise in the text, isn't it?

[12:33] Because you think, well, what's that all about? OK, so those are the surprises in the passage. And I looked at a little bit more detail at the prediction of Jesus' death.

So let's go back to the beginning then and look at the two goes. So the way it works is this. They bring him, not bling, that's different.

They bring him a blind man and they ask him to touch him. This is verse 21. So Jesus takes the blind man by the hand and leads him outside the village.

That's rather a touching detail, isn't it? So Jesus holds his hand, takes him and leads him outside, presumably where it's quieter.

And maybe there's lots of people saying, oh, we'll come as well. And Jesus presumably says to them, excuse me, you just stay there. I want a quiet word with my friend here. We're going outside. You just stay there.

[13:33] So he takes him outside the village and he spits on... Whoops, I've gone too far. He touches him and spits on the man's eyes.

Now the spitting links with 7 verse 33, doesn't it? Because Jesus spat then. So I think we're meant to link the curing of blindness with the curing of deafness and dumbness.

You know, remember that man who was closed and this sigh of Jesus be opened. Do you remember that in 734?

And here Jesus is employing the same idea of spitting in terms of blindness. And we're also noticing that this has been the constant dialogue, hasn't it?

Do you have eyes but you can't see? Do you have ears but you can't hear? Do you not understand? It's all been about perception. So these things are linked.

[14:41] And he spits on the man's eyes, puts his hands on them. This is verse 23. And says, do you see anything? And he says, I see people like trees walking around.

That always fascinates me. Presumably he knew what a tree looked like. So perhaps the blindness had come on him later. So perhaps he knew in childhood what a tree was. So when he could straight away see, he thought, oh, that's like a tree.

So I don't know. But that's not very clear, isn't it? If you went to Specky Wren and they put you in front of the, you know, Z, P, T, Z, whatever that thing is.

And he said, what can you see with your new glasses? And you say, well, I can see all the trees who are waiting for their eye examination in your... Do you see what I mean?

It's not... Where am I going with this? To see people as trees walking is not good eyesight, is it? You'd need a second touch.

[15:48] So Jesus touches him again. And his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything, whatever this word means, with a sort of, even in the distance he could see brightness.

And there is a secret here. Don't go into the village. Don't tell anybody. Presumably that's the idea of not going into the village.

And that links up with things as well, isn't it? Because Peter is told, verse 30, not to tell anyone. So I think we've got some things going on here which are actually linked together.

And I like to suggest that this two-stage miracle, this two-goes at bringing about perception, is really a comment on what's going on all the way through this.

And personally, I think that makes a lot more sense than to say that Jesus failed his driving test the first time. Do you see what I mean? So, twos.

[16:57] Have we had anything, do we have anything, in which there are two stages? Well, yes, actually, we had two feeding miracles, didn't we? Do you remember that thought that they saw the feeding of the 5,000, and then they saw the feeding of the 4,000, and they still didn't understand?

And Jesus was willing to go through the whole thing twice to get people to understand, which I find an encouraging thought. You know, he says to them in effect, okay, you didn't get it the first time, do the whole thing all over again, and here it is.

So, we've certainly got that, two feeding miracles, twin feeding miracles. You with me? The 5,000 and the 4,000, the two of them.

How many goes did it take them? Well, it took them at least two. I don't know why I put that implication, Jesus. Jesus is patient.

Jesus is willing to take two goes. And with many of them, he takes a lot more than two goes, doesn't he? But he certainly took two goes on this. And then I think we have something even more relevant.

[18:13] The two or twin aspects of Jesus' person and work. Number one, he's the Messiah. So, we get that. And we get to the point where Jesus can say, Who do you say that I am?

And Peter can say, You're the Messiah. You're the King. You're the glorious one. You're the one who's going to reign and rule. You're the one who's going to inherit the kingdom.

You're the son of David. You're going to be like Solomon. Queen of Sheba is going to come and seek you and be amazed at you. You're the King. And yes, that is correct.

Yes, that is correct. But it's only half the story. You need a second touch to get the second thing. Because Jesus plainly says, part two, The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law.

He must be killed and after three days rise again. He says it plainly, but Peter says, No! Oh, that can't be right. So, it seems to me that here, Peter's going to need two goes to get the full story of Jesus.

[19:33] Number one is the Messiah. That's right. The suffering servant. Ah, no, no. Okay. So, we're going to have to go, Jesus is going to have to teach this one from scratch.

So, let's think of these two aspects of Jesus' person and work. He's the Messiah, the Son of God, the King of Kings, the ruler of the world.

He is the one who inherits glory and honor and wisdom and power. And in the book of Revelation, that's exactly what they say, isn't it? Glory and honor and wisdom and power belongs to the one on the throne.

This is the bit that we're now told to think about that he is the sufferer. The Son of Man must suffer many things, including rejection and death.

So, we have now a whole thread, or, yeah, a whole cluster of threads in the Bible that are the sufferer.

[20:41] Just take a look, would you please, at Psalm 22. And if it's anything, it's a sufferer speaking in Psalm 22.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? Oh my God, I cry out by day, you do not answer by night, and I'm not silent. I am a worm, verse 6. I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men, despised by the people. All who see me mock me, they hurl insults, shaking their heads. He trusts in the Lord, let the Lord rescue him.

Let him delight in him, let him deliver him since he delights in him. And so on, verse 15, my strength is dried up like a pot shard. My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth, you lay me in the dust of nith. It's interesting, it's a Psalm of David, and you say, when did David ever experience anything quite as intense as this? That's a very good question. But as David's writing this, it's a Psalm of a sufferer.

[21 : 51] And Jesus is saying, that's me. I'm this as well. And as you read it, you may well think, I can remember some quotes of that.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Did anybody say this in the Bible after this? And at what time did he say it? When he was dying on the cross.

Jesus is saying, this, if you like, section B, suffering. That's me as well. The suffering servant, Isaiah 52 and 53.

Where Isaiah looks forward. In Isaiah 52, verse 13. The Lord's servant will act wisely.

He'll be raised and lifted up. But we're told about this servant in chapter 53, verse 3. He was despised and rejected by men.

[23 : 02] A man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised and we esteemed him not.

A sufferer. He suffers terribly. He was oppressed and afflicted, verse 7. He did not open his mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter.

A sufferer. Now, Isaiah 53. Isaiah 53, sorry, Psalm 22, I don't think gives you any particular reason for the suffering.

It just suffers. In Isaiah 53, we are given a reason. And the reason is breathtaking. That this suffering person suffers because God's hand upon those who deserve to suffer is transferred to the servant instead.

And it's there in verse 4. Isaiah 53, verse 4. Surely he took up, he took up our infirmities. And he carried our sorrows.

[24 : 12] Yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions. Do you see the interchange of the he and the us?

He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him.

By his wounds we are healed. There's this exchange or transference. What belonged to us fell on him.

It's explicit and clear each time, isn't it? Verse 6. Verse 6. We all like sheep have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way.

And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. Well, there's a reason for the suffering in Isaiah 53.

[25 : 10] And, of course, did you notice that when I quoted the praise to the one who sits on the throne, about his power and wealth and wisdom and strength from Revelation chapter 5 around verse 12, for example, that praise is given to the lamb who was slain.

The lamb is a suffering sacrificial figure. And Jesus is saying, you might need two goes to get this. You've got the fact that I'm the Messiah, the king, but the bit that you might not get is I'm the suffering servant, the sacrifice, the lamb.

And Jesus is prepared to teach this very patiently. And that's exactly what he does in Mark's Gospel. And he gets to A, the glory of the Son, via B, the suffering of the suffering servant, and there is no other route.

Of course, that's exactly where Jesus so strikingly differs with Peter. Because Peter says, you can have the glory. You don't have to go to the cross.

[26 : 34] And Jesus says, that is man thinking, not God thinking. Luke 24, 26 is where Jesus says, the Christ must suffer and thus, and then enter his glory.

He gets to A, via B. Do you see what I mean? He gets to the glory of the kingship via the suffering of the sacrifice.

That's the root. And the worrying thing, because I think it's worrying, the thing that is unpalatable and difficult to cope with, is that Jesus says, that's exactly the way for Christians too.

That's what he says, isn't it? If that's who I am, the sufferer who comes to glory via suffering, that's who I am.

If you want to follow me, then that's the way you have to go too. The Jesus who does B to A, glory via suffering.

[27 : 53] So you might, exegesis means sort of a Bible explanation. And you might say, well that's very clever. Because I'd always wondered about the two goes at healing the blind man.

So that's a good explanation. It's very clever that is. Does it make any difference? And the answer is, of course, it makes a huge amount of difference. Because it isn't just an answer to a conundrum.

Jesus actually makes this worryingly fundamental to the Christian life, which is what he's doing in verse 34 to 38. So he's taught them this is his identity, his work.

And then he calls everybody and says, look, here's a very big lesson for everybody to learn. And you've got to learn this, verse 34. If you want to come after me, come after me in brackets, the king who gets there via the cross, you have no option but to say no to yourself.

Oh. To say no to yourself. Who is this self? I don't know this person. Who is this? I don't know. Ignorance about you say no to yourself. You deny yourself.

[29 : 10] And take up a cross and follow Jesus. And he makes it fundamental, doesn't he? There is no other way to be a Christian. There is no other way to follow because there's no one else.

Because this is the way that Jesus went. Whoever, verse 35, wants to save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.

So it's about following Jesus. And I say worryingly fundamental because I think it is worrying. It's very challenging to us because we quite like the Christian life to be easy and happy and straightforward.

And Jesus says, well, it wasn't that way for me. And it won't be that way for you either. He talks about, see, fundamental.

Saving life or losing life. I don't think it could be any more fundamental than that. And he says this is the key to saving life and losing life. If you're going to try and cling to your life, you lose it.

[30 : 14] But if you are prepared to put your life into my hands so that I've got your life, then I might, goodness knows what I would say to your life, but you give it to me.

You lose it to me. If you do that, then you save it. It's completely countercultural. It's completely at odds with what we would say ought to be the case.

Well, we think a bit like Peter, don't we? We think in a human way. And Jesus says, well, I'm thinking in a God way. He talks about saving and losing life.

And he uses the vocabulary of shame. Verse 38, if anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation. I haven't quite got my head around the adulterous and sinful generation.

But the shame bit I think we get the idea of because we say, I'm not actually keen on this Jesus. And there are plenty of alternative Jesuses being put around, aren't there?

[31 : 23] I'm pretty sure that if you put on the satellite TV, you could find some version of Jesus who does want you to be healthy now and wealthy now and never ill in this life.

And that your life will always be happy and that your self will be enlarged and, you know, it will all be about you.

I'm sure you could find Jesuses who say that sort of thing. But the Jesus who said what he said, well, Jesus says, are you going to be ashamed of me?

So that you will, you know, you're ashamed of me. You know, like an awkward person that you go to a meeting with and you prefer if they sat over there and you say, oh, I don't know who that person is at all, really.

Jesus says, are you going to be ashamed of me like that? Because if you're ashamed of me, there will come a day when I will say before my Father, I don't know who that person is, I will be ashamed of you.

[32 : 39] Very, very uncomfortable, isn't it? Very uncomfortable. When Jesus returns, when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels, if we've been ashamed of Jesus, Jesus says, I'll be ashamed of you.

Well, you see, it's very radical. And it's very uncomfortable. It's all to do with getting these two lessons about who Jesus is.

And what does it affect? Well, I would suggest that the next bit of Mark's Gospel is telling us all the things this affects.

And it actually affects everything. So if you just care to flick through, in chapter 9, we're going to have the weakness of the disciples who can't manage an exorcism.

And Jesus says in verse 29, chapter 9, verse 29, you need prayer. And I think this comes off the back of the weakness of the suffering Messiah, that we partake in that weakness.

[34 : 02] And what is, well, I remember Lucas saying this, and I think he was right. He was saying, what prayer? Answer, prayer is weakness. Prayer is saying, we can't manage this on our own.

We need you, Lord. We can't do this. That's what prayer is. And there's quite a profound truth there, isn't it? It affects us, makes us people who pray.

Do you pray? Conscious of a need to pray? Perhaps we've learned something of that lesson. 9.35. Jesus, they were arguing about greatness, you see.

9.35. And Jesus says, if anybody wants to be first, he must be the very last and a servant of all. E.g. this child. There's lessons about humility that come off the back of the king who is the servant.

There's lessons of generosity of spirit in 9.38. We saw someone driving out demons in your name. We told him to stop because he wasn't one of us. He doesn't get the same magazines that we get.

[35 : 07] He doesn't go to the same Christian conferences that we go to. So we told him to stop.

And Jesus says, you know, that's not right. You can't do that. They hadn't learnt about generosity of spirit.

Marriage is what he discusses next. And do you, I think this is, I think they had a human-centered view of marriage. You know the idea, I think it was popular among the Pharisees that when the Pharisee's wife didn't please him in every way, you just get rid of this lady and trade her in for a newer model.

And Jesus says, that's not the way. That's not the way of sexuality if I'm the Savior.

I think the shadow of that comes over into marriage. 10.16. How you value little people. Verse 16.

I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will not enter it.

He took children in his arms and put his hands on them and blessed them. How you value little people. Not important people.

[36 : 26] Not people that are going to put a lot of money into the assistant pastor's fund. I mean, people who are little.

How do you look at them? And then we do come to wealth and status. The rich young man and the disciples are saying, oh, he's going to be a great sign up for the kingdom, Lord.

You don't nudge, nudge. And Jesus lets him walk off and says, it's harder for, easier for a camel to go through the ivy needle than a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.

And the disciples are shocked. So, and I think this is, all comes under the same heading. The question of how wealth and status are evaluated in the kingdom.

And then 10.42, which I think probably brings it to the climax. And I don't think, I think they're still struggling to learn this lesson. 10.42, James and John have asked, can we have the best seats in the kingdom?

[37 : 29] Like to sit next to you, Lord, when you come into your kingdom. And the others are crossed because they hadn't thought of asking it first. Verse 41. When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John.

And Jesus called them together and said, you know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them. And their high officials exercise authority over them. You know that, don't you? That's the way they do it. That's the way you do it.

In a royal family, in a, when you come to power, that's what you do. Well, you won't. He says to them, verse 43, not so with you. Instead, anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant.

Service, you see. And whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.

So I think it affects everything. And I'm afraid that's all I've got for you. I can't spin it out any further. But these two lessons of who Jesus is.

[38 : 38] He is the king, but he's the king who suffers. And that profound truth is marked on the life of every Christian.

That's the Jesus that we follow. And that's what we've got to work out in our daily lives and our attitudes and our, yeah, all of that.

Let's sing number 396. Let's sing number 396. Thanks.