

Mark 8:22–30

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Preacher: David Helm

[0 : 00] Our scripture reading today is from Mark chapter 8, verses 22 through 30. If you're using one of the red Bibles in the pews, you can find it on page 820. At this time, children up to the age of 5th grade, as well as the workers that are working with them, are dismissed for their programs.

Please stand for the reading of God's Word. Mark 8, 22 through 30. And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village. And when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, Do you see anything?

And he looked up and said, I see men, but they look like trees walking. And Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again. And he opened his eyes.

His sight was restored. And he saw everything clearly. And he sent him to his home, saying, Do not even enter the village. And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi.

[1 : 15] And on the way he asked his disciples, Who do people say that I am? And they told him, John the Baptist. And others say Elijah. And others one of the prophets. And he asked them, But who do you say that I am?

Peter answered him, You are the Christ. And he strictly charged them not to tell no one about him. This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated.

Well, just a special welcome, especially to those university undergrads who might be here for the first time and are a bit still unaware of how things at Holy Trinity work.

You'll be glad to know that you're in a place that provides dinner for you nightly, as Pastor Jay already mentioned, or I should say weekly at any rate. So bring your friends along.

After the service today, if you're affiliated with the university, we have different families host for dinner. And it gets to be a rather large gathering. Tonight, John and Joan Allison are hosting.

[2 : 25] Their home is just a couple of blocks away. And we'd love to have you join them tonight. Ten, ten, ten.

October 10th. Two thousand and ten. Forty-four years ago, my life changed.

I still have a receipt from the hospital. I was five at the time. And it's dated 10-10-66.

I was on one side of the street, red radio flyer wagon loaded with mud balls.

My friends were divvied up, half on the other side, and our great mud ball fight began.

[3 : 36] It wasn't long, on this day, those now many years ago, that I became the subject of every mother's proverbial wisdom ever since.

Don't throw mud balls. Someone lost their vision that way one time, or at least so I've been told.

And so it was for me. It came flying across.

And I saw it approach right into the left eye, running into the house, my mother washing water from my eyes, holding her hand over my right eye.

Can you see me now? No! And washing more water, being hauled to the car, and off to the doctor, and my father coming from work, holding me at the age of five.

And I can still remember the doctor's voice. He'll need to go to the hospital right away. And I exploded in tears. Four operations. Regions.

[4 : 39] Never any luck recovering my vision in the left eye. People ask me, well, what do you see? I say, well, it looks a bit like trees.

People are like trees walking. If you want to know how good that is, it's of no use at all.

If it was in both eyes, I'd be legally blind. I'm not looking for your sympathy today.

Peter comes along. Jesus says, well, who do you say that I am? Peter says, you are the Christ.

And I say to you today, of no value at all. It isn't that he's coming along the way.

[5 : 50] He doesn't get it. It's not like the Apostle Paul, whose eyes were blinded, and someone came and laid hands upon him, and something like scales fell, and he saw everything clearly.

No. Peter's great confessional statement, you are the Christ, is of no use at all.

Or so I have come to believe. For a long time, I came to these two texts, situated so nicely, one next to the other.

The image and metaphor, of course, of sight, this blinded man who could not see, perfectly paralleling Peter, and his inability to see.

And Jesus says, do you see anything? And he comes to Peter, and he says, but who do you say that I am? And sermons upon sermons upon sermons have dripped nothing but devotional sentimentalism upon this text to the point that when you and I read it, we actually think, wow, they're making progress.

[7 : 19] Yes. Peter's coming along. He said Jesus is the Christ. How do we get such a laudatory comment when you take the context on either side?

Look at the following context. Verses 31 and following. He began to teach them immediately at this time 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 said this plainly. And Peter, this one that we claim is coming along, took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, get behind me, Satan.

In other words, you don't get it. you don't get me. Fall back in line until you're given understanding. Look at the preceding context to our vignettes that are coupled so nicely in the midst of chapter 8. It isn't this harsh criticism that he gives to Peter, but rather there are these hard questions put to all the disciples.

[8 : 41] Take a look back all the way to verse 17 and Jesus, aware of this, that is that they were wondering, oh man, we don't have bread, we needed bread. He's talking about the leaven's bread. Who forgot the bread?

He says, why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes, do you not see?

Having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember? And then I love this, he takes them into to the classroom, to math class.

You know, some people are visual learners, some people are classroom learners. They hadn't learned anything in the visual department, so he sits them down behind the desk and he says to them on the chalkboard, when I broke the five loaves for the 5,000, how many baskets were broken pieces did you take up?

And they said, 12. 12. Good. And the 7 for the 4,000, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?

[9 : 43] And they said to him, 7. And I think there's a long pause there before verse 21. As he waits for recognition, and he finally can only, in a frustrated way, speak with the voice of your teacher and like my teacher, do you not yet understand?

Our text sits between those two. Don't you understand? Hard questions? Get behind me, Satan.

Not as severe a criticism as you're going to get. And yet, we appeal to our verses as Peter is along the way? Let me tell you what high school math was like for me.

I was an A student as long as the teacher was doing the work. I was in constant need of the teacher.

As long as the teacher was at the board explaining the problem, doing the problem, yes, okay, yes, I see that, yes, I've got it. But as soon as she would send me home with the homework and three identical problems, it became quickly evident that I understood nothing.

[11 : 13] Left alone, I was without understanding. And the disciples are without understanding. reading. I want to take a look at our text, but I want to help you see the context.

Have you ever thought of the questions that Jesus asks before he left math class in frustration and loaded them up into the yellow school bus and took a trip to Bethsaida hoping to teach them in another way?

You ever look at the questions? Are your hearts hardened? Well, those were the very words, the hardened heart, that not only he had used in reference to the disciples in chapter 6, 52, but also in reference to the religious leaders in chapter 7, their hearts were far from God.

Having eyes do you not see and having ears do you not hear and do you not remember? Take a look back at what this text is referring to.

It's the healing of the deaf man in chapter 7. Jesus heals the deaf man and beginning in verse 31, we see that he came along a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment.

[12:47] He didn't speak well and he couldn't hear at all. And Jesus heals this deaf, nearly mute man.

To the point in chapter 7, verse 37, they are astonished and they say he has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.

Let that roll through your mind when you hear these words. Having eyes do you not see? Having ears do you not hear?

Do you not hear? this thing about the fish and the loaves and the 4,000 and the 5,000, those two events are also sandwiched between what we're preaching on this week and what Pastor Jay preached on last week.

The feeding of the thousands are listed first in chapter 6, verse 30 and following, and then the first verses of chapter 8 are the 4,000.

[13:59] Twice these feedings of multitudes. I want you to look at it because the first one is significant. Verse 30 of chapter 6, the apostles returned to Jesus, they told them what they had done and taught and he said to them, come away by yourselves where?

To a desolate place. Verse 32, and they went away in the boat to a desolate place. An intentionally chosen word wilderness by Mark.

To the point where you get to verse 35 and when it grew late his disciples came to him and said, this is a desolate place. And what does he do in the wilderness?

He feeds them all. chapter 8, in those days again a great crowd had gathered and they had nothing to eat.

Verse 4, and his disciples answered him, how can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place? And he feeds them. And when he feeds them, it does nothing to help them understand who he is.

[15:26] And when he heals a deaf man, it does nothing. And when the mute speak, it does nothing. And when a man who was blind is progressively able to see, it does nothing.

Nothing. So let me just say that those two very stubborn facts, the harsh criticism and the hard questions indicate that for a long time we've gotten our own text wrong.

It would do you no good at all to see men walking as trees and it does you no good at all to say that Jesus is the Christ if you don't know what the Christ is or what he came to do.

Do you remember how Mark began? the good news of Jesus the Christ the Son of God according to who?

Isaiah. The good news of Jesus the Christ the Son of God according to Isaiah. The whole book can be known in those very words.

[17:07] I'd like you to turn back to Isaiah in chapter 35 and I appreciate your willingness to allow me to spin this web until it all becomes clear that Isaiah was a prophet who long ago wrote words about what God was going to do on behalf of his people and in chapter 35 we see that his promise will come to ransom his own in the midst of where?

Verse 1 the wilderness and the desert will be a place that rejoices and blossoms like the crocus and the word of course in verse 4 is pivotal to Mark's gospel all the way through say to those who have an anxious heart be strong fear not behold your God will come with vengeance with the recompense of God he will come and save you then the eyes of the blind shall be opened the ears of the deaf unstopped then the lame man shall leap like a deer and the tongue of the mute sing for joy for waters break forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert that is the promise of Isaiah concerning the work of God when he will redeem his people that you would have paralytics restored and running like deer the blind given sight the ears of the deaf unstopped and the tongues of the mute singing for joy take a look back in Isaiah chapter 24 the very opening words behold the Lord will empty the earth and make it what desolate verse 12 desolation is what will be left and what is the mark of the desolate world in need of God's work verse 7 the wine mourns the vine languishes all the merry-hearted sigh but what will happen in that hour when God brings his great reversal chapter 25 verse 6 the Lord of hosts will make for all the peoples what a feast of rich food a feast of well-aged wine of rich food full of marrow of aged wine well refined and he will swallow up on this

mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples the veil that is spread over all the nations he will swallow up death forever and the

Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth what will the people say behold this is our God we have waited for him that he might save us the word of Isaiah was that God was going to wreak havoc on the world until everything looked absolutely desolate and then he would come and prepare his meal of rich food for his people the word of Isaiah is that in that moment people who had these spiritual or I should say physical deficiencies of sight and sound would be overcome and metaphorically they would be able to see he who has ears let him hear and all of that all of that

I believe is wrapped up in Jesus's questions to his disciples and in this moment of incredible frustration in chapter 8 where he says do you not yet perceive or understand are your hearts hardened having eyes do you not see having ears do you not hear do you not remember in other words don't you know the promises of God let me put it this way you might think that boy there was something I'd like to call the apostolic advantage they got to be there they got to hear him they got to see him they had an unfair start it's hard for me to believe that Jesus is the

Christ the son of God who came to forgive my sins but if I had been there if I had seen it if I had all the advantages they had had well then certainly I would have come to the very thing that they thought as well and the answer to the scriptures is absolutely fundamentally no there's no apostolic advantage you are no better off having been Peter than who you are no better off how does that make you feel that makes me feel great because I don't call myself a Christian based upon what I have seen I am a Christian because of the coherence of these words which have been fulfilled in the report about Jesus my faith in Christ is rooted in the promises of Isaiah and they can never take that away so what do you need to be able to answer the question who do you say that

[23 : 45] I am in the Greek that text emphatic you who do you say that I am well you didn't need to be there you don't need a vision tonight you don't need to win the lottery to let him know he loves you you need to believe on the basis of the coherence of the prophetic word wedded to the person and work of Christ that's it it's all you need the gospel according to Isaiah Spurgeon once put it this way I reckon that many of you in business are quite content to get written orders for goods and when you don't you do not require a purchaser to ask you in person you would just assume he should not in fact you commonly say you'd rather have it in black and white is it not so well then you have your wish here is the call in black and white

I do hope that over these weeks!

as we are! exploring the question who was Jesus and does he still matter we would be freed from this disastrous notion that we would have had an advantage if we had only been present no your faith is firm not because you're hoping against hope but because you're trusting in words long ago written down that are fulfilled in the person of Christ that indicate God is uniquely at work in him and is trustworthy for you!

our heavenly father as we explore this notion it would mean then that everything is of grace all of it that unless you reveal yourself to us we are undone all the way through and we take pleasure in knowing that you choose to reveal yourself to us by the power of your Holy Spirit through words the word the word of life we are grateful for this in his name amen