

Seeing Jesus Clearly: The Call to Discipleship

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Preacher: Dan Nelson

[0 : 00] Well, good morning, church. I'm so glad to be here. Just in case you didn't hear my name before, it's Pastor Dan Nelson of the Grove Church. And I'm thankful to be here with my brothers and sisters.

And I'm thankful for the partnership in which you guys have joined in on in planting us in Union Grove. It has been amazing. I'm just thinking of the Thanksgiving prayer for 2024. And just it has been amazing to see what the Lord has done in my family's lives, in the partnership with Christ the King, and the gospel opportunities that we are already having in Union Grove. And I just want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your partnership in that. It makes it possible. So thank you. Now, many of you don't know me, and that's okay. But if you talk to my wife, one of the first things she would tell you about me is that I am a giant softie. I mean, any good, actually it doesn't even have to be good, any hallmark level movie that pulls on the right heart strings is probably going to get me to cry.

[1 : 03] Which, you kind of look at me, I'm a bigger guy, that might surprise you a little bit, right? It's so bad that, in fact, one time I was going through Instagram and just kind of looking at different videos and seeing what was on there, that one time I came across a young child, clearly in a doctor's office.

And this child couldn't have been more than two. And all of a sudden, the doctor goes and puts some glasses on this little girl. And you could see the moment the glasses were on and over her ears that her whole world just lit up.

Someone that was born without the ability to see was given the ability to see. This little girl, for the very first time, is witnessing all of the beauty that we all know that she was missing out on. Now, funny enough, this is a rabbit hole in social media. There are tons and tons of these videos. I just checked last week to make sure that they're still going. They're still there. So if you want, you can go look for them and you can find them.

There's something beautiful about a daughter seeing her mother and father for the first time and just lighting up and smiling.

[2 : 16] Up until this point in her life, she had been looking at this blurry vision, this blurry, colorful blob in front of her that would talk with her and feed her and change her and play with her.

But in the moment that she's given glasses to see, she's able to see for the first time this person that has been caring for her, loving her, playing with her, and her world is completely changed in that moment.

This voice that was just blurry is now seen in the full beauty and full detail and depth which was fully intended from the beginning. And in today's passage, we will actually see that Jesus gives spiritual sight to his disciples.

He gives them glasses to see so they can clearly understand who he is. This journey today begins with partial sight. And it progresses to a deeper revelation.

And it ultimately ends with a challenge to embrace the costly cost of discipleship in sight of his coming kingdom.

[3 : 30] Our passage today is in Mark chapter 8, 22 through 9, 1. So if you turn there with me in preparation for reading, that would be wonderful. Mark 8, 22 through 9, 1.

Now this is the turning point of the gospel of Mark. Mark, up until this point, Jesus has been demonstrating his power through miracles and healings and teachings and ultimately his authoritative teaching.

But now here, at this point, he is going to reveal his true mission. His true mission as the suffering Messiah. And he calls his disciples to follow him down a very unexpected path.

The disciples are invited to see clearly, follow courageously, and to live with eternal priorities. And this invitation is for us today as well.

Jesus calls us to see him, to follow him completely, and to prioritize his eternal kingdom. Let me read God's word for us.

[4 : 40] It says this in Mark 8, 22 through 9, 1. He 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. And on the way, he asked his disciples, Who do people say that I am? And they told him, And others say Elijah. And others say 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 to tell no one about him. 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 said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, Get behind me, Satan.

[6 : 15] For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man. And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

For whoever would save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake, and the gospels, will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?

For what can a man give in return for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous, and sinful generation, of him, will the son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his father, with the holy angels.

And he said to them, Truly I say to you, there are some standing here, who will not taste death, until they see the kingdom of God, after it has come, with power.

This is the word of the Lord. The word of God this morning, is shaped around Jesus' response, to the disciples' bickering.

[7 : 25] Right before this, they're saying, there isn't enough bread. And Jesus responds to them, and says, Do you not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened?

Having eyes, do you not see? Having eyes, having ears, do you not hear? Do you not yet understand? And then Jesus goes on, and exposes who he is, and how he should be seen, through these three scenes, that we have in this morning's text.

Each scene deals with, seeing or witnessing, and it has a contrasting moment, between partial sight, and full sight. The first scene contrasts, partial physical sight, with full, high definition, physical sight.

Right? The baby girl without glasses, the baby girl with glasses. And the second shows, partial spiritual sight, against spiritually defined, spiritual sight.

And lastly, we see that disciples are called, to live their lives, with their eyes focused, on heaven, not earth. The first scene, which is in verses 22, through 26, occurs in Bethsaida.

[8 : 43] And it exposes, the progressive nature, of sight. Jesus shows us, the progressive nature, of sight, when people, bring him a blind man.

They beg him, to touch the man, and to heal him. Now Jesus does, something unusual here. He takes the blind man, out of the village, away from the crowds.

Now that's not quite abnormal, because he does a lot of miracles, outside the sight, of crowds. But what is strange, is he performs this healing, in two stages.

First, Jesus spits on the man's eyes, and lays his hands on him. And when he asks the man, if he can see, the man responds, I see people, but they look like trees, walking.

Now the healing here, is incomplete. Jesus lays his hands, on the man's eyes again, and this time, the man's sight, is fully restored, and he sees, everything clearly.

[9 : 42] Why does Jesus, heal this man, in stages? This is the question, we should be asking, when we come to a text like this, that is so clearly different, than what he's been doing, right? Every other miracle, in Mark's gospel, has happened instantaneously, up until this point.

This progressive healing, is intentional. It is serving, as a parable, for the disciples, spiritual journey. They have seen, Jesus perform miracles, calm storms, and even raise the dead.

They have heard his teaching, witnessed his authority, and yet their understanding, of who Jesus is, is actually incomplete. It's blurry, like trees walking.

This two-stage healing, illustrates the gradual process, of coming to understand Jesus. Spiritual sight, often comes in stages.

We may see glimpses, of Jesus' power, and grace, but our understanding, remains partial, until he brings, a greater clarity. humility. This should be, an invitation, to humility.

[10:48] To recognize, that we all need Jesus, to touch our eyes, and help us see, more clearly.

Continually. Now, over these last few months, as I've started ministry, in Union Grove, I have had, some wonderful, fun, and sometimes difficult, theological conversations, with many people, in Union Grove.

Some with those, that believe, and some with those, that are still seeking, but maybe don't know, that they're still seeking. Maybe they, attended a church, or maybe they were, catechized as a child, or whatever.

Maybe they grew up, in some sort of, a church family, so they understand, who Jesus is, but they don't, know who Jesus is, in their heart. They don't, follow Jesus.

And I'm convinced, from these conversations, and honestly, in my own walk, with the Lord, that there are always, areas of our spiritual vision, that are blurry, like walking trees.

In my own testimony, I grew up, in a Christian household, with a grandfather, that was a pastor, and who disciplined me, as a young child, and I went to Christian camps, and I went to church, and I attended, a Christian school, until I was in the fourth grade.

[11:59] Like, I knew the story, of the Bible, and I knew, who Jesus was. Right? I could proclaim, he's the Messiah. I could do that.

And yet, it wasn't so much later, in my life, that I actually had, full vision, full sight. God ultimately, revealed, who he was to me, through Wistosha Lakes Church, through the preaching there.

Church, about 20 minutes, east of here, 30 minutes, east of here, or so. And I remember it, so vividly, that I went from, I know who God is, to I know, the Messiah.

And I know, that I need him, because ultimately, I am a sinner. And I need the sacrifice, that Jesus is going to tell, his disciples about here, in just a moment.

And if you're looking, towards Jesus, maybe your vision, is a bit blurry. You might have an idea, you might think you have an idea, of what you're looking at, but you aren't quite certain.

[13:04] When you have questions, and doubts, let this passage, actually be an encouragement, to you. Because Jesus, is patient. And he shows it, with his disciples here.

He invites us, all to come closer, so that he can, touch our eyes, and give us sight, of who he really is. And that is true, for my beloved brothers, and sisters here, that already believe, in Jesus.

But that is also true, of those that haven't yet, found Jesus, or see him clearly. And he wants, you to see him fully, and to know his perfect life, his death, on the cross, and his resurrection.

Jesus, progressively heals, the blind man, to illustrate, our need, for clear, spiritual, vision. Now in, verses 27 to 33, we see, after the healing, of Bethsaida, Jesus takes his disciples, on a journey, to the villages, of Caesarea Philippi.

On the way, he asks them, a crucial question. Who do people say, that I am? The disciples respond, with various opinions, circulating, among the crowds. Some say, John the Baptist, others say, Elijah, some say, just another prophet.

[14:21] Jesus gets, a little bit more pointed, a little bit more sharp, right? I love him, when he does this, when he just, he gets in, he's like, no, no, no, let's get to the truth, of the matter. Who do you say, that I am, my disciples?

Peter answers, you are, the Christ. In verses 27 to 33, this second scene, is framed around, Peter's, dual confession, and Jesus's, correction, of Peter.

He acknowledges, that Jesus is, the Messiah, the anointed one, of God. This is a significant moment, right? The disciples are beginning to see Jesus, more clearly.

But, we very quickly see, that this witness, is still not clear. He still doesn't have, quite the clear vision. The truth in the middle, of that confession, and correction, is essential.

And it's actually, the center point, of this text. Jesus immediately, begins to teach them, that the Son of Man, this is verse 31, the Son of Man, must suffer many things, and be rejected, by the elders, and the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed.

[15 : 29] And after three days, rise again. Peter, in this moment, is unable, to reconcile, this suffering, with his understanding, of who the Messiah is.

And so, he takes Jesus aside, and he rebukes him. Peter's rebuke, is his second confession. And it actually, is revealing, his own misunderstanding.

He sees Jesus, as the Christ, but he cannot, accept a suffering, Christ. Peter, like all Jews, until this point, expected, a traditional, king.

A commanding, Christ, who would topple, Rome politically, and rule, in a very human, understanding, of conquering, and kingdoms. Like the blind man, who saw people, like trees, walking, Peter's vision, of Jesus, was still, blurry.

Jesus, Peter, wanted, a triumphant, Messiah, not a suffering, servant. I don't want to, blow by that. Peter wanted, a triumphant, Messiah, not a suffering, servant.

[16 : 43] This is, the paradigm shift, of the gospel of Mark. Jesus came, onto the scene, and proclaimed, the kingdom is here, I am the king, follow me.

It's Mark 1, and following. And now, Jesus is proclaiming, I must suffer, be rejected, and be killed. The most significant part, Peter, clearly misses. He says, after three days, he will rise, from the dead, defeating death, and sin.

Jesus says, I'm coming back, and I'm coming back, triumphantly. Peter does not see, the suffering, Messiah, that sits, before his very eyes.

Jesus, Jesus corrects, Peter sharply. This is in verse 33, he says, get behind me, Satan. I can't imagine, a friend, saying that to me.

[17 : 47] Could you imagine, your God, saying that to you? For you are not, setting your mind, on the things of God, but on the things, of man.

Peter, Peter, actively tried, to stop Jesus, from suffering, and he unknowingly, was opposing, the plan, of God.

Jesus explains, that his suffering, is the only way, to defeat Satan, and rebukes Peter, just as he did, to the devil, in the wilderness. Peter's misunderstanding, of Jesus' mission, shows how human, thinking, can conflict, with God's purpose.

purposes. And we all do it. When disciples, when brothers, and sisters in Christ, when we, try to take, control, instead of following Jesus, we actively, oppose God's will, the same way, Peter does here.

For Peter, Jesus' death, seems impossible. But for Jesus, it is, essential. He needs, to see Jesus, not only as Christ, but as the, suffering Christ, who will lay down, his life, for the salvation, of many.

[19 : 05] He's just not quite there. We are invited, to see the same thing. Peter's struggle, is one, that we all face. Many are drawn, to the power, and authority, of Christ, and Jesus, but find his suffering, and the call, to follow him, in sacrifice, much harder, to accept.

Jesus invites us, to see, the whole picture. His suffering, was necessary, to bring salvation. Do you see, all that he has, sacrificed, for you?

Do you see, how he suffered, for you? Will you, embrace him, as the savior, who gave, everything up, for you?

Jesus calls, us to see him, as the suffering, Messiah. That's what we see, in the second scene.

Now, after correcting, Peter, Jesus, emphasizes, his needs to suffer, his need to suffer.

And then, Jesus calls, the crowd to him, along with his disciples, and he begins, to teach them, about the true nature, or cost, of discipleship. In verse 34, through 9-1, we're going to see this, but I'm going to read, verse 34 for us, where it says, if anyone, would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

[20 : 43] This third, and final scene, of the text, 34, through 9-1, shows us, that the path, of discipleship, is costly, but it leads, to glory.

Let me repeat that. The path, of discipleship, is costly, but it leads, to glory. Now, this is the heart, of Jesus' call, to his followers.

Discipleship, is not, about power, or prestige, or status. It is about, self-denial, and sacrifice, and following Jesus, even to the point, of suffering, as he did on the cross.

Jesus suffered, for his kingdom. He was rejected, as king, and now, we are called, to follow him, entirely. in that suffering.

The imagery, in this text, of taking one's up cross, would have been, shocking, to Jesus' listeners. We might, have watered that down, over time, because we see, the cross, as a symbol, of hope.

[21 : 54] But I promise you, these people, did not see the cross, as a sign of hope, at that time. It was a sign, and symbol, of execution, shame, and suffering, only meant, for the lowest, of low, criminal scum, that the world, had to offer, at that time.

Jesus, is calling, his followers, to embrace, the way, of the cross. The call, to suffer, to die, to themselves, to die, to their desires, and to die, to their agendas, in order to follow, God's agenda, and plan.

He continues, in verse 35, and he says, for whoever, would save his life, will lose it. But whoever, loses his life, for my sake, and the gospels, will save it.

True life, when you hear this, true life, is not found, in self-preservation, but in self-surrender, to Jesus, and his mission.

Let me say that again. True life, is found, not in self-preservation, but in self-surrender, to Jesus, and his mission. Jesus, suffered, for the gospel.

[23 : 13] He suffered, for his name. He suffered, for his own words. He suffered, for the gospel. The call, brothers and sisters, is not simply, to be, good people.

It is to follow him. It is to live, your life, for the sake of Jesus. And as Jesus, points out explicitly, in 835, give your life, for the gospel.

Lose your life, for the gospel. Some of you, might be going, to a place of, but Dan, I'm not called, to be a missionary, to that tribe, that might spear me, to death, as I go into the Amazon.

Right? You might be going, to these extreme images, of I'm not called, to be a Bonhoeffer. I'm not called, that's not what I'm called, to be. Right? But each, and every one of us, in our day-to-day lives, in our jobs, in our families, in our homes, in the workplace, in the places you go shopping, in the places you go, to pay your bills, we are all called, to live with the gospel, at the front of our mind, life, hands, mouth, feet, and tongue.

every one of us, are called, to put the gospel forth. And every decision, we ever make, should be made, in the lens of, how does this help me, move the gospel forward?

[24 : 37] Jesus says, in verse 36, he says, for what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? The cost of following Jesus, is high, but the cost of not following him, is infinitely higher.

To gain the world, but lose one's soul, is an ultimate tragedy. Do not chase, the world's priorities, of success, comfort, and power.

Value your soul, and the souls of others, over the world's view, of you. And answer Jesus's invitation, to live, with eternal, kingdom, priorities.

That means, when you're saying, I've got this job opportunity, your first question, should not be, what's the title, what's the money? I've been there.

God does provide, for us financially. I'm not saying, he doesn't. But the question, that should be ingrained, in every decision, we ever make is, how is this helping me, move the gospel forward? How can I use this, for God, and his kingdom?

[25 : 46] Jesus ends this teaching, with a promise. He says, truly I say to you, this is Mark 9, 1. He says, truly I say to you, there are some standing here, who will not taste death, until they see, the kingdom of God, after it has come, with power.

Now this statement, points us forward, to the coming, manifestation, of God's kingdom. kingdom. Right? It points us towards, Jesus' resurrection, the spread of the gospel, through the early church, and ultimately, the eternal kingdom.

The promise, of the coming kingdom, should encourage, us, as we face, the cost, of following Jesus. It should encourage, the crowd, that Jesus was talking to.

It should encourage, the disciples, who just found out, that the Messiah, they've been following, is not a conquering king, right there in that moment, but a suffering Messiah, that they will follow, to the cross.

And most of you know, the stories of the disciples. They suffered. They truly suffered. Brothers and sisters, we should have, great confidence, and we should be encouraged, and more importantly, be emboldened, to follow Jesus.

[26 : 54] Knowing that all, he promised, has happened. And the promise, of his return, will as well. Jesus, will return.

The path, of discipleship, is costly. It may be marked, by suffering, but it ultimately, leads to the glorious, return of Christ, and our ascension, into heaven, and the new earth, and the new creation.

And we can, bank on that. Jesus is honest, about the cost, of following him. It is not, an easy path, but it is the path, to true, and eternal life.

What, are you holding on to, that keeps you, from surrendering, and following Jesus fully? He invites you, to surrender it, and find life, in him.

Jesus' invitation, to follow him, is not, just about sacrifice, but it is about, gaining, the kingdom of God, as we just, talked about. He offers you, a share, in his eternal, kingdom, a hope, that transcends, his life.

[28 : 06] Will you accept, his invitation? If you do, you will be, a co-heir, in the kingdom of God, with Jesus Christ.

Brothers, and sisters, what does it mean, for you to take up, your cross, and follow Jesus? Where, where, is Jesus calling you, to deny yourself, to surrender your desires, or embrace suffering, for his sake?

Remember, Jesus' call, to self-denial, is not a call, to misery, but to true life, life that can only, be found, in him.

How, does the promise, of the coming kingdom, motivate you, to endure, discipleship? Fix your eyes, on the hope of Jesus, his return, and the glory, that awaits, those who follow him.

It'll all be worth it. It'll all be worth it. The kingdom, of God, is coming, in power, and those, who follow Jesus, will share, in his ultimate, eternal, victory.

[29 : 16] The path, of discipleship, is costly, but it leads, to glory, beyond our imagination. That's what, the third scene, shows us.

Glory, beyond imagination. Through Mark, 8, 22, 9 through 1, we have been called, to see something. We've been called, to see Jesus, as our suffering, Messiah, Messiah, to follow him, sacrificially, and to live, for his eternal kingdom, above all else.

We're invited, to see Jesus clearly, to understand, who he truly is, and to respond, in faith, and obedience. Like the blind man, at Bethsaida, we all need Jesus, to touch our eyes, and give us sight.

Like Peter, we may have glimpses, of Jesus's identity, but struggle, to accept, the full picture, of his mission, as the suffering Messiah. And like the crowd, we are called, to count to the cost, of following Jesus, to take up our cross, and to live with, eternal kingdom, priorities.

Now the Dan Nelson, that knew Jesus, because he grew up, in a Christian home, but didn't actually, fully see Jesus. Never thought, he would be standing, where he's standing.

[30 : 36] Never thought, that he'd be proclaiming, the gospel, in the way I'm proclaiming, the gospel. I thought I knew Jesus. But it actually, took the hand of God, to come into my life, and to reveal, who he really was.

And when he did that, he revealed, who I was. A sinner. In need, of the suffering, Messiah. We are invited, to see Jesus clearly, to understand, who he truly is, and to respond, in faith obedience. Like Peter, we may have glimpses, of Jesus' identity, but we struggle, to accept, the full picture. Jesus, is, patient.

Remember that. He invites you, to come closer, to ask your questions, and to let him, reveal himself, to you. Questions, are not bad.

And I know, your pastor, would love, and your elders, would love, to answer, any questions, you may have, about seeing Jesus. Following Jesus, is costly, but it does lead, to true life, and our hope, is focused, on his eternal kingdom.

[31 : 51] Today, Jesus invites you, to see him clearly, and to follow him. The passage, ultimately teaches, this simple truth, and here it is. It's kind of a long thing, for a simple truth, but hopefully, you get that it is simple.

To confess, Jesus, is to embrace, a new identity. Acknowledging, who he is, while surrendering, to who you are meant to be.

His disciple. When you proclaim Jesus, you're proclaiming, I am a sinner, in need of a savior, and I am your disciple, and I will follow you.

Do you see, Jesus, our suffering Messiah? Do you follow him, sacrificially, and live for his eternal kingdom, above all else? If you confess Jesus, then you must, live a life, surrendered, to him.

See Jesus, live for him, and keep your eye, on his kingdom. Let us pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you.

[33 : 04] We thank you, for revealing yourself, to us, in your word. We confess, that our vision, can often be blurry, that we struggle, to see you clearly, and to understand, your ways.

Father God, for my brothers, and sisters, we thank you, that you have touched, our eyes, and given us sight, of you as the suffering Messiah. And we ask, that you continually, touch our eyes again, Lord, to give us clarity, of sight, to see you, as the Christ, so that we will continue, to follow you, in your suffering.

Father, I pray for those, not yet, brothers and sisters, in the room, that have not yet, been touched, that have not yet, been given sight. I pray, that you would come down, on them, and that they would see you, for who you are.

And that they would understand, what that says, about them. You are, the suffering Messiah, who laid down his life, for us. Lord, give us, courage to take up our cross, to deny ourselves, and to follow you, trusting that the path, of discipleship, leads to true life.

May we live, with eternal kingdom priorities, valuing our souls, and the souls of others, above all else, and fixing our hope, on your coming kingdom. It is in Jesus' name, that we pray, and by your spirit, that this work, will be done.

[34 : 20] Amen.