

Healing a Blind Man -- Mark 8:22-26

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Please bow your heads with me for prayer:

Father, all of our Worship Service has been for the glory of Your Son, Jesus Christ. The story we are about to consider from the book of Mark is all about Him, too. May we experience what You want us to experience of Him. May I say what You want me to say about Him. And may those listening hear what you want them to hear about Him. In His name we pray, amen.

I'm sure most, if not all, of you have been following the news about the recent earthquake and tsunami in Japan. Amidst all the tragedies there have been a few miraculous rescue operations. One of the more publicized stories is about a 60-year-old man who was washed out to sea along with his house. Somehow he managed to get on top of the roof. He and his house were carried over nine miles from shore. This man happened to have a red cloth. He used it to try and flag down various helicopters as they flew over as well as several ships as they passed within view. But for two days his efforts were to no avail. No one noticed him. Then a Japanese military vessel spotted him. Members of the ship's crew rowed out to him in a small boat and rescued this one man. His words to his rescuers were, "I thought today was the last day of my life."

In spite of the thousands of casualties from this disaster, the news of this rescue of just one man has been carried around the world. In our story today Jesus passes, not off the shores of Japan, but through the town of Bethsaida. And there He rescues one man.

Let's begin with a summary:

As Jesus passed through Bethsaida, some people led a blind man to Him, begging Him to touch him. Jesus took him by the hand and led him out of the town. After spitting in his eyes and laying His hands on him, the man could see men walking like trees. When Jesus laid His hands on him again, the man saw everything clearly. Jesus then sent the man to his house, forbidding him to return to the town.

So, what did Jesus experience in this story? First of all, He experienced a request for healing. The course of events recorded in Mark 8:22 are in many ways similar to those in the story of the deaf-mute man. Just a few weeks ago we looked at that story from Mark chapter 7, where Jesus healed a man who was both deaf and mute. Both stories took place in the same general region. In the story of the deaf-mute man, Jesus was on His way from Tyre and Sidon, traveling through the region of Decapolis. And so He would have been east of the Sea of Galilee. In today's story Jesus is in Bethsaida on the northeast side of the Sea of Galilee. In both stories a man was led to Jesus, and those who brought him begged Jesus to touch him. You may notice other similarities between these two stories as we go along. So, Jesus first of all experienced a request for healing. Some people bring to Him a man who is blind. This is the first time Mark records Jesus healing a blind man. Certainly, Jesus would have healed other blind people before this, but Mark has not specifically pointed these incidents out. He has mentioned Jesus healing all kinds of sicknesses and diseases and blindness would certainly have been one of them.

Second of all, Jesus experienced restoring sight in seclusion. Jesus responded to the people's request for Him to touch the blind man by taking a hold of him by the hand. He then led him out of the town. No one questioned what He was doing or worried what He might do with the blind man. They all were certain that He would grant their request. As soon as they were out of town, Jesus spit in his eyes and laid His hands on him. You may have notice already a couple similarities here with the story of the deaf-mute man. In both cases Jesus led the man away and proceeded to apply spittle to the infected area. Now, in our culture, this would have been disgusting and humiliating. But the culture in which this story takes place in would have seen this as a medicinal application. Saliva was seen as having medicinal properties. After applying the spittle to the man's eyes, Jesus laid His hands on him, most likely on his eyes. Then Jesus asked him a question. "Do you see anything?" In response, Mark 8:24 says the man "looked up", or it could be translated "looked again". It seems that this man's response to Jesus' question was an act of faith. He responded to Jesus' question by looking up, or looking again. Notice what he says in Mark 8:24, "I see men like trees, walking." It's an

interesting description. Apparently he had been able to see before at some point in his life. He knew what men and trees looked like, even with only partial eyesight. He was able to describe these moving forms as men, who were walking like trees. This man's act of looking and describing what he saw reveals faith. His healing at this point was only partial. He could have taken a bitter attitude, and complained about not being able to see clearly. But he didn't. He looked up. He looked again. He obediently and sincerely described what he saw.

Jesus responded to his faith by laying His hands on him a second time. What Mark describes as happening next reveals an immediate and complete healing. The translation of verse 25 is a bit jumbled up. The words are out of order. The first result of Jesus' touch as recorded by Mark is that he saw clearly. He had been able to see the moving forms of people walking, but now he sees clearly. Next Mark records that this man was restored. He was given his sight back again. He was able to see as he had as a child. His visual senses were put back in working order. Third, Mark uses the same word as previously, which can mean to "look up" or "look again". But in most cases in the New Testament where this word is used and a blind person is involved, it means "to receive sight". Mark uses these three words which, by themselves, would have been enough to explain this man's healing. And yet the repetition is used to emphasize his complete and full restoration. As if these three words were not enough Mark also adds two adverbs to further describe this man's healing. One is translated, "everyone" in verse 25. But in fact it is a strengthened form of "everything", as if the usual word for "everything" was insufficient. The second adverb in verse 25 is translated, "clearly". Literally it means "a far-off shining or radiance". It further emphasizes that fact that this man who was blind can now see everything clearly from a distance. Far away objects seem to twinkle and shine in brilliance and clarity. Truly this man's healing was full and complete.

Last of all, Jesus in our story experienced keeping in seclusion. Mark 8:26 says that Jesus sent this man away to his house. Instead of allowing him spread around to everyone the news of his healing, Jesus tells him to go home. Apparently his house was outside of town, because Jesus' words recorded in Mark 8:26 prohibit him from going back into town. There are several variations to Jesus' instructions in the various Greek manuscripts, but the overwhelming emphasis in all of them is that Jesus did not want this man going back into town and spreading the news of his healing. Jesus was still seeking seclusion Himself and he likewise instructs this man to remain in seclusion in his own house.

How is Jesus revealed as our example in this story? How does He reveal to us what it means to be a healthy Christian? First of all, He is revealed as our example in that He was committed to a full restoration. Jesus continued to work in this man's behalf until his sight was completely restored. The first time He laid his hands on the blind man, there was only a partial restoration. So, Jesus laid His hands on the man a second time. He did whatever He needed to do so that this man's sight would be fully and completely restored. And as we have already considered Mark's description of this man's condition after Jesus laid His hands on him a second time is filled with repetition and superlative-type words.

And so Jesus reveals in this story that a healthy Christian is someone who is driven to experience all the fullness of God. How often as Christians we are caught up in wondering if we will even make it to heaven. Instead of experiencing all that God has in store for us here and now, we often get discouraged and declare, "I'd be happy if I could just somehow make it to heaven." We hope that maybe we'll squeak in somehow. But notice what the apostle Paul prays for in Ephesians 3:17-19. (Read) Paul wants us as Christians to have a strong foundation. He then wants us to go on a journey of limitless discovery, trying to comprehend the vastness of Christ's love for us. He ends with the incredible words, "the fullness of God". The possibilities as a Christian are limitless. And a healthy Christian has a vision of all that God has in store. And nothing moves me like my desire to experience the endless journey of full and complete restoration.

And yet there is more than just restoration in Christ. God's Word declares that we have been given more in Christ than we ever lost. Ellen G White says it so well in the magazine "Review and Herald". She wrote this back on February 25, 1915:

"By His life and His death, Christ has achieved even more than recovery from the ruin wrought through sin. It was Satan's purpose to bring about an eternal separation between God and man; but in Christ we become

more closely united to God than if we had never fallen. In taking our nature, the Savior has bound Himself to humanity by a tie that is never to be broken. Through the eternal ages He is linked with us."

In Christ, to be human is to be united to God as a son or daughter. We are not restored as sons and daughters of Adam. We are made sons and daughters of God Himself. And so Jesus reveals that to be a healthy Christian means to keep going after God's full and complete restoration – a restoration that goes far beyond what we have lost in Adam's fall.

Second, Jesus is revealed as our example in that He called for a testimony. Jesus asked the blind man a very interesting question. After spitting in his eyes and laying His hands on him, He asked the man, "Do you see anything?" In asking this question Jesus was giving this man an opportunity to verbalize and acknowledge the healing that was underway. He had not been fully healed at this point. He was still in the process of being healed. And yet Jesus called for him to give a testimony for the healing he had experienced up to that point. In essence, Jesus was asking the man, "Do you see any progress from where you used to be?"

And so He reveals that a healthy Christian is someone who testifies of what God has done for them. As you look back on your life this past week, or this year, it might not seem like anything significant has happened. But Jesus calls us to be looking for something to share. How would you describe what has God done for you this week? Do you see any progress from where you used to be? There's a song entitled, "Remind Me, Dear Lord". Here's the chorus:

*Roll back the curtain of memory now and then
Show me where you brought me from
And where I could have been
Remember I'm human, and humans forget
So remind me, remind me dear Lord*

I would like to extend the same invitation to you that Jesus did to the blind man in our story. What healing have you experienced? What has the Lord done in your life this past week or this year? I invite you to either stand where you are or to come forward. Testify of God's working in your life. You may still feel like you have a long way to go. But that's ok, because God is not finished with you. Your full and complete healing is coming.

Our story today finds Jesus in between phases of ministry. His Galilean ministry has ended. His next ministry will be in Peraea. But this phase has not yet begun. During this time Jesus did not sit around waiting for His next ministry to begin. He didn't sulk or become discouraged. He kept moving. He kept reaching out. He spent time with the non-Jews. He continued to follow His Father. As a result every day of His life had purpose and meaning.

Maybe you're in a chapter of your life similar to Jesus' in our story. Maybe you're wandering around not sure where you fit in to God's plan. Maybe you think your best days are behind you. Maybe you keep looking for that magical moment when your dreams will finally come true. Follow Jesus' example – let your Father in heaven give meaning and purpose to your life right now. Today can be the best day of your life.