

But What About You?

I want to take us through the next part of Mark's gospel. Turn to **Mark 8:22-38**. As you do I want to give you a little background on where Jesus is and what's happening. The Scripture tells us in verse 13 that Jesus and the disciples crossed to the other side of the Galilee and verse 23 tells us they came to the town of Bethsaida. This town is just North and East of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus would heal a blind man here and then Jesus and the disciples would travel on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi in the far northern part of Israel, in what is known as the Golan Heights, in the foothills of Mt. Hermon.

A neighboring town to Bethsaida was a place called Gamla. On top of a rocky ridge or hill, Gamla would become a center for the Zealot movement. According to one source, Jehuda of Gamla, a Pharisean scholar, together with Rabbi Tzadok, another Pharisee, founded the Zealot movement. These folks believed that God alone was the ruler of Israel, not a Roman Emperor. They refused to pay taxes to Rome. Acts 5:37 mentions Jehuda or Judas and that he led a band of people in revolt. This is Jehuda of Gamla. Gamla became famous when a few years before the fall of Jerusalem, the people of Gamla held out against the Roman army and rather than surrender, they all threw themselves off the cliff, similar to what would happen at Masada in the South. In fact, those of you that know about the history of Masada, Eleazar, the leader of the zealots of Masada was a grandson of Jehuda of Gamla.

Why am I telling you all of this? So you will understand where Jesus was and what the religious and political sentiment was of the folks in this area. The zealot movement had a high expectation of the coming of Messiah, but they also had a very definite political idea of the Messiah and what his mission would be – what he would come to do. They expected the Messiah to come and lead his people to victory against the Romans. They expected him to be a warrior like David with the wisdom of Solomon.

While Simon among Jesus' disciples is identified as a Zealot, Peter and Andrew, James and John and Philip all came from this part of the Galilee. (Bethsaida means house of the fisherman.) It is quite possible that they all had this same expectation of the Messiah - of who he would be and what his mission would be. Perhaps this has

been part of the problem all along. They had been trying to reconcile their life-long expectations of the Messiah with what they were seeing and learning about Jesus. He didn't fit their image of Messiah and yet they had to admit he was like no other man they had ever met. I want you to see the political and religious atmosphere in this particular area of Israel because it plays a part in what happens in the rest of this chapter.

It's in Bethsaida that Jesus healed the blind man's eyes and asked him "Do you see anything?" It's an interesting question for Jesus to ask. There was nothing unusual about people bringing a blind man to Jesus. People brought the sick to Jesus all the time and he healed them immediately. But we don't have another record of Jesus asking a blind person he touched if they could see anything. The man told Jesus he could see people, but they looked like trees walking around, so **"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."**

I can't tell you why this man didn't receive an instantaneous miracle. Perhaps it is a lesson to us, that even in miracles of healing, sometimes the healing is progressive, over time. There is no reason to think it had to do with a lack of faith on the blind man's part or a lack of power on the part of Jesus.

Notice the Scripture gives us three different verbs to describe this man's progressive healing. 1) His eyes were opened, 2) his sight was restored, 3) he saw everything clearly. Maybe it does teach us the importance of waiting patiently in faith as sometimes healing occurs over time, but I think there is something else of significance for us to consider. I think it is a message about spiritual blindness and spiritual sight for all of us.

This miracle takes place between two separate accounts of the disciples own spiritual blindness. Mark 8:14-21 when Jesus asks them, "Do you still not see or understand...Do you have eyes but fail to see." – and Mark 8:31-33, when Jesus rebukes Peter for his blindness in not seeing God's plan and mission for the Messiah and instead wants to force his own vision of the Messiah upon Jesus. **The blind man of Bethsaida and the disciples of Jesus both need a second touch in order to see clearly.**

I think often we fall into that category as well. We need a second touch. Sometimes perhaps a third or fourth or maybe a fiftieth touch. We refuse to see, we are slow to comprehend, our eyes need to be opened but it's like we can't really focus. He touches us again and then our sight is restored - we can see, but maybe we don't understand everything we are seeing, or can't quite believe what we are seeing. And then we need another touch in order to see everything clearly.

The disciples had listened to Jesus teaching through the parables and they had seen the miracles, the signs and demonstration of the presence of God's kingdom. Their eyes had been opened, but their sight was still not restored. They couldn't see God's plan for the Messiah. They still didn't understand God's plans for His kingdom instead of their plans for Israel's kingdom. They couldn't grasp the meaning, the significance of all that was happening around them. So Jesus touched their spiritual eyes again. Notice verse 32 says, "**He spoke plainly about this**", referring to his crucifixion and resurrection. Their eyes were opened but now it was time to begin to focus, to see the big picture of God's redemption plan. He wanted them to see clearly, but they were still struggling. They needed another touch.

How is your faith this morning? How is your spiritual vision? Are your eyes opened, partly, but yet you can't quite get everything into focus? You still need God's touch again. You need a second touch. You need a new revelation, a new understanding, new spiritual insight. And the good news is, Jesus is willing to touch you again!

I'm so glad he didn't say to the blind man of Bethsaida, "You only get one shot at this. One touch and if you don't have enough faith for healing, well, that's just too bad. You should have had more faith. Sorry." I'm glad he didn't say to the disciples, "That's it. One too many arguments about stuff that didn't matter. Too slow on the uptake boys. You're history and I'm picking some new disciples." Instead, he touched the blind man again so he could see clearly. Instead he spoke plainly to the disciples and instructed them again and again so they could see and understand who he was and what he had come to do. It was after he ascended to heaven that they finally understood, but Jesus never gave up on them.

I'm glad he didn't give up on us when we didn't get it the first time, when we

doubted, when we were slow to obey or understand. I'm thankful for the second touch today.

After the man is healed, notice Jesus tells him to go home, but don't go into the village. Go home to your family, but don't go telling everyone about the miracle. Jesus didn't want to build up any additional Zealot fervor about him being the Messiah because he knew they were still blind to what his real mission was. They didn't understand God's plan for the Messiah. They wanted to circumvent God's plan and choose Jesus for a plan of their own making. Reminds me of a lot of politicians today that want to hijack Jesus and use him for their own political gain but have nothing to do with his real mission and his plans.

Jesus takes the disciples and they travel on up to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. This area of Northern Israel is beautiful. Herod the Great built a temple in this area in honor of the Roman Emperor and later his son, Phillip the Tetrarch enlarged the city and renamed it Caesarea Philippi. The city or area is now called Banias and the Banias is one of the streams that flow into the Jordan River.

This area got its name from the Greeks who referred to it as Paneas after the nature god Pan. Quoting from one source, "Pagans performed rites in the caverns near the source of the springs. The Arabs corrupted the Greek "Paneas" to "Banias", its current name."

(Here is a picture of Banias and the caves where this pagan worship occurred.) It is at this site tradition tells us, Jesus asked the question of his disciples, "Who do people say I am?" Jesus knew they had been talking among themselves and they had been overhearing the comments from people in the area. "Could this be the Messiah? Have we found the anointed one? Will he lead us to victory?" Some of the Pharisees thought he was from the devil. Some of his relatives thought he was crazy. The people from his hometown thought he was just one of them and doubted he could be anything but a carpenter. Some thought he was a prophet. Some said he was John the Baptist back from the grave, or Elijah, coming as a forerunner to the Messiah. But then Jesus asked the essential question. **Who do you say I am?** The disciples had been calling him Rabbi. Teacher. And more than once they had asked each other, "Who is this? Who is this that the wind and waves obey? Who is this that even the dead are brought

back to life? Who is this?" And now the moment of truth. "Who do you say I am?"

It is Peter who steps forward to say what all of them had perhaps been thinking. Their eyes had been opened. Their sight was being restored and they were starting to see. **"You are the Christ,"** Matthew's gospel adds, **"the Son of the Living God."**

Matthew 16:17 tells us Jesus told Peter, **"Blessed are you...for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven."** Peter's eyes had been opened. He had received sight. But like the blind man at Bethsaida, he wasn't yet seeing clearly.

After this step of faith in announcing Jesus to be the Christ, he warns them not to tell anyone about him. And then he began to teach them plainly and clearly what was going to happen to the Messiah. Forget all the political expectations you've had about the Messiah who was to come. Here is the real reason I have come, the reason born in the heart of God the Father before the foundation of the world. I have come to be the Lamb of God, slain as the ultimate, once and for all sacrifice that atones for your sins. As that sacrifice, I will suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and then be killed and after three days I will rise again."

Jesus begins to teach them about this Messianic mission. Are you ready for the real Jesus? The real Messiah? One writer said, "Jesus is the expected Messiah in the most unexpected manner."

Peter can't handle it. His eyes have been opened, his sight restored, but he can't see clearly yet. It's like the blind man, he is seeing men as trees, walking around. This isn't the plan for the Messiah that Peter has been waiting for all of his life. He hasn't come to suffer and be defeated in death, so Peter does the unthinkable. He took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him. Matthew records his words to Jesus, **"Never Lord. This shall never happen to you!"** "We won't let you suffer and die. We will fight for you and with you." Peter was insisting that Jesus change in order to fit Peter's idea of the Messiah. Peter could see who the Messiah was, he just couldn't see the mission as having anything to do with suffering or death. Kind of sounds like some believers today who can't see how suffering and death can play any role in the life of a Christian. We are often still trying to force Jesus to measure up to our image or squeeze into our mold of what the Messiah should look like and what he should do and

how he should respond to us.

Jesus' response to Peter was dramatic. **“Get behind me Satan! You do not have in mind the things of God but the things of men.”** Peter, like most of us, wanted to take Jesus as we want him to be, but not necessarily as Jesus really is. We want to make a Messiah of our choosing. One that fits our needs and wants, our expectations and our view of the world. Peter had an idea, or an ideal of what the Messiah would do and suffering and dying was not part of his ideal.

I wonder how often in our spiritual journey, if our spiritual eyes had been seeing and our spiritual ears listening, I wonder how often we might have heard Jesus say to us, **“You do not have in mind the things of God but the things of men.”** I wonder how often we have put our agenda above God's agenda, our will over and above his will for our lives? I wonder how often by our choices we have by default lined ourselves up beside Satan and against God's plan and purpose like Peter did that day. Do our choices reflect the fact that we have the things of God in mind rather than the things of men? Does our lifestyle show we value what God values rather than what man values? And how do we make sure we have the things of God in mind and not the things of men?

Jesus tells us how as he calls the crowd to himself and along with the disciples he begins to teach them about God's purpose and the way of the cross. Not just his cross, but their cross - our cross as well. **“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but 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, yet forfeit his soul?”**

When we surrender our life to Jesus, when we make him Savior and Lord and die to ourselves, when we give everything we have and everything we are to him, that's when we begin to see clearly. That's when we start to discover not only what his life and mission is all about, but what our life and mission and passion is about as well.

Do you think Peter and the disciples started to see clearly after this? The evidence suggests they still couldn't grasp it all. It was not until after the resurrection that they began to see clearly and I understand why. But how about us today? What do you see? We already have the benefit of the crucifixion and resurrection. We have

a full revelation of who he really is and what it was he came to do. So now the greater question falls to us.

Who do you say Jesus is? If you say he is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, then what does that mean for you and your life? What does it mean for Jesus to be the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior and Lord of your life? Do we try to remake him and fashion him into some other kind of Messiah? Do we try to make him our good friend and heavenly pal but not the Lord of our life? We make him into the Messiah who calls us only to the blessings but never to the cross.

I think it's time we ask him to touch us again so we can see clearly. Open our eyes, restore our sight, but Lord, touch us again so we can see everything clearly. Let us see your plan and purpose for us and our lives. Let us see what it means to take up our cross and follow you. Let us see the joy that comes with complete surrender, when we lose our life for his sake and find what life is really all about.

Who do you say he is and what does it mean? I say he is the Christ, the Son of the Living God and it means I have found the only one worth serving and living for. I say he is the Christ, the Son of the Living God and that not even the forces of hell can separate me from his love and his purpose.

What do you believe about Jesus and what are you going to do about it?
Surrender to him and find life!