

## 95-08-06Mark

It is to assemble here with fellow believers to worship through singing, through scriptures, through stewardship, through fellowship, all of the things that you have made possible for us through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Now, as we look into the record of scripture and we see the activities of Jesus Christ in this portion of the Gospel of Mark, we pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will minister it to our hearts. We pray that it will become a part of the resources in our soul, that it will be the object of faith, and in the presence of that faith, your power will be active in us and among us.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. It is a fact that because of the wonders of communication, we can experience things, we can see places, we can observe the wonders of creation without physically being there.

Some of us take trips and go on tours. Some of us have traveled for other reasons, whether it is the military or missions work, and we have seen at first hand some of the magnificent scenery, some of the great works of man that have been done all around the world. Some of the others of us maybe have seldom traveled beyond the confines of our own county or our own state, and yet we are aware of the magnificence of these things.

How is it that we come to know about things that we have never seen, places where we have never been? We have a great ability, unlike the animals, to communicate to one another and to vividly describe and depict things to one another. So if one of us goes to a far off land and returns, we can describe that. Now with modern technology, we can bring back snapshots, we can take videos, we can watch the travel channel if we are in an area that carries that on cable and see these wondrous things, and yet we are sitting comfortably in Tahlequah experiencing something all the way around the globe.

It is the peculiar heritage of human beings to be able to do that. Although seeing the ants that have been emerging this summer from the wall over at the house, I know that one ant can communicate where he has been to many other ants and bring them along, but they all come and experience that at first hand it seems. We have the ability to see, observe, and even experience things at a distance.

And that's a great advantage when it comes to our life as believers because there is an experience that we need. There are observations that are required for us that we cannot make at first hand. We can't travel to heaven and see the face of God.

We cannot experience with our senses the presence of Jesus Christ, teaching, living, and sins. We receive these things at second hand and yet God expects them to become a greater reality in our soul than what the evidence of our senses provides. And that's a great challenge.

It requires having eyes that can see and having ears that can hear, but it requires something

more. It requires a commitment to make those things that are taken in through the eyes and through the ears a reality in our soul. And it's a difficult hurdle because our nature and our instinct tells us go with what you know.

Go with your experience. Go with what you've seen. Go with what you've heard.

Someone bringing in evidence from something that we haven't personally experienced doesn't seem to weigh as heavily as our own observation and our own experience. And yet this is what we are called upon to do. Why are we believers in Jesus Christ? Why do we think that He came and died and rose again and is seated at the Father's right hand? None of us have any personal first hand knowledge of those events.

We are taking someone's word for it, aren't we? And so now the question becomes, whose word are we going to take? What are we going to choose as a reality? Because there are many alternative explanations for our existence on earth. There are many other rationales that people use to live their lives. There are other realities that people attempt to communicate to us.

And yet we are called upon to believe the reality that God presents. How has He communicated that reality to us? Has an angel with a flaming sword walked down Muskogee Avenue in Tahlequah and said, behold, and as He points to the sky, the heavens part and we see God seated on His throne? No, at least not in my experience. Have we been sent a videotape that purports to be taken in heaven? We haven't.

What's the point? The entire record, the entire body of information that we have about that unseen reality that we believe in and that we live our lives by is in this book. It's in the Bible, the Word of God. God has given us His Spirit to confirm that revelation.

He's put the knowledge of Himself in our hearts so that we can recognize this revelation when we hear it and see it. Nothing else in life will quite satisfy the need that we all feel in our souls for relationship with God and understanding of God. And when that need, that built-in hunger is not fulfilled, we live our lives feeling needy.

We live our lives feeling unfulfilled, feeling that there must be something more. There must be something that we don't have yet and if we could just get it, that vacuum in our soul would be filled. And this fundamental motivation is what drives people into what has been called a frantic search for happiness, a frantic trying of different solutions.

Well, maybe if I work harder, maybe if I achieve success, maybe if I achieve financial security, maybe if I can come to believe that I have made a difference during my life on the earth, made a difference in other people's lives, made a difference, set up a family that will be here after I'm gone, leave some sort of monument to my presence, maybe seeing that will fulfill me. And yet deep in our hearts we know that there's only one thing that fulfills that built-in hunger and that's relationship with God. Failing to see that reality might be called blindness.

The spiritual reality of God and His character and His plan is more real than the pews on which we sit. It's more real than the walls around us. It's more real than the ground and the trees and the planet upon which we live.

God manifesting Himself in the person of Jesus Christ is more real than anything we have experienced. And yet our instincts tell us that our experience is more real. This is a fundamental decision that we face at some point.

How are we going to live? What are we going to make the basis of our thinking and our decisions? Is it what we believe, what our own experience tells us, or is it this unseen, unknown that is communicated to us through God's Word? Jesus Christ came in the flesh to try to make those unseen realities as real as possible. All the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in Him in bodily form. God distilled the ineffable, eternal, unsearchable essence of Himself into human form and sent it to walk among us for 33 years.

You would think that the people who lived in that time, who are as close as any of us could ever come to seeing at first hand those eternal, invisible realities, would be persuaded by seeing it without question. Here is the Son of God. Here is the embodiment of everything that God is and wants to communicate to us.

And how startling it is to discover that even in the presence of the Son of God, there were those who did not see. There was a blindness, there was a hardness of heart that prevented perceiving that great reality that God so much wants us to know and accept and live by. In Mark chapter 8, we have seen this.

In the entire Gospel of Mark, particularly in this most recent chapter, we have seen this. In verse 11, after some two years of ministry and healing and teaching and manifesting Himself to the nation of Israel, the Pharisees, the religious leaders, those who were on the mountaintop closest to God, the greatest students of Scripture, the greatest leaders of the nation, those to whom everyone else looked up, confront Jesus Christ. If anyone should be able to identify Him and see that He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures, it is the Pharisees.

No one knows the Scriptures better than they. Yet in verse 11 of chapter 8, it says, the Pharisees came out and began to dispute with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven. Isn't this extraordinary? We have just witnessed seven and a half chapters of signs.

The voice of God speaking from heaven, the blind seeing, the lame walking, the deaf and mute receiving hearing and the ability to speak, the dead being raised, a few loaves and fishes being multiplied to feed an enormous crowd, and the leadership, those who are best in a position to recognize the signs, don't even know that a sign has been given. Give us a sign so that we may believe, after two years of earthly ministry. Not only His own ministry, but Jesus has already at this point sent His disciples out and given them authority to cast out demons, to heal the sick.

And so, twelve emissaries, six teams of disciples have gone forth and manifested these signs. And the Pharisees are here in verse 11 of chapter 8, disputing with the Son of God, disputing with God Himself, saying, give us a sign that we may believe. How extraordinary, how shocking this ought to be to us, and how alarming, because anyone can do this.

We are not exempt. It isn't as though this could not happen to us. It isn't as though we couldn't live our lives and be great students of the Scripture.

And in the course of pursuing various minutia that we find in Scripture and various manifestations of relationship with God in actions, and in our traditions, and in the things that we seek to see others do and to have ourselves do as a standard of righteousness, miss the very presence of God. It can happen. If you had gone to any Pharisee in Israel and said, do you think it would be possible for God to come face to face with you and for you to miss Him? He would say, are you kidding? I've been a great student of the Scriptures from my youth.

I can quote three quarters of the book of Isaiah to you. I can quote vast portions of the Pentateuch. If anyone would recognize God, it's me.

And yet, as a group, they missed Him. One or two, we know that Nicodemus woke up. We know that Paul the Apostle, a Pharisee, woke up in the presence of Jesus Christ.

Turn with me back to Matthew 11. Matthew 11, verse 21. Isn't it interesting that Jesus, in His ministry, did not concentrate on Jerusalem, the capital of Israel? He is the Messiah.

If He is to be accepted and rule on the throne of Israel, where will He be located? Where is the throne of David? What is the city of David? It's Jerusalem. And yet, the vast majority of Jesus' ministry isn't in Jerusalem. It's not even near Jerusalem.

Where is the bulk of Jesus' ministry? Where does He do most of His teaching and His mighty works? It's up in Galilee. He makes an occasional foray down to Jerusalem, but He spends the bulk of His time up north. And He travels even up into Tyre and Sidon.

He travels in the Decapolis on the east side of the Sea of Galilee. Isn't this strange? The seat of government, the seat of wisdom, the seat of religion is Jerusalem. And yet, relatively speaking, Jesus spends little time there.

Why is that? Because there is a greater chance of seeing the truth without that baggage of religion, without that baggage of tradition. Remember in our last study, when Jesus warned His disciples in the boat, He said, Beware the leaven of the Pharisees. Beware the leaven of Herod.

Beware of that baggage that can blind and can harden and can prevent the perception of the truth. So, Jesus spends the bulk of His time among the people up north. Who were Jesus' disciples? How many Pharisees, how many religious leaders and scribes became a part of the Twelve? Not a one.

Tax collectors, fishermen, insurrectionists even became a part of Jesus' disciple band. Remember Simon the zealot? No Pharisees, no scribes, no synagogue rulers joined the circle of disciples. Isn't that strange? The people who thought themselves best equipped, not a one of them showed up to bring in the church age and to communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world.

Jesus didn't spend much time addressing them. And why is that? Hardness, blindness, inability to see that reality that He tried to communicate. And even up in the north, even with those people that did not have that baggage, up in Galilee, few, relatively few, understood who Jesus was and why He had come.

So, in verse 21 of chapter 11 of Matthew, Jesus stands up in the region where He concentrated the bulk of His ministry. And He says, Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in Sackcloth and Ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you.

And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained unto this day. But I say to you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you.

What a horrible indictment! The people of God, to whom belong the Law, the Prophets, the Covenants, the Promises, the Heritage, the eternal future destiny which God gave through Moses and through the Prophets, have completely missed the presence of God Himself in their midst. You may recall that Chorazin and Bethsaida and Capernaum are all located on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. They make sort of a triangle up there in the northwestern section.

This is where the bulk of Jesus' ministry was accomplished. Bethsaida, by the way, is the hometown of Peter and Andrew and Philip. We find this out from John chapter 1, verse 44, where it says that Bethsaida was the town of Peter and Andrew and Philip.

Why is this important? Turn back with me to Mark chapter 8, where we resume our study in verse 22. After Jesus' experience in the boat with the disciples, He says, Beware of the leaven, and they think He's upset because they have brought no bread. And He says, Why do you reason because you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Even you, the twelve who have been with Jesus Christ for these two plus years of ministry.

He asks them in verse 17, Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened? Having eyes do you not see? And having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember? And then He reviews with them the feeding of the five thousand and the feeding of the four thousand, and He says, How is it that you do not understand? Even these who were free from the trappings

of, largely free from the trappings of religion and the trappings of political ambition, still had difficulty accepting the spiritual reality that Jesus communicates. And now in verse 22, He came to Bethsaida. This is not an idle detail.

When the Bible tells us that Jesus went somewhere, it's important. He's back at Bethsaida. What is Bethsaida? That's where His first disciples came from.

That's the hometown of Peter and Andrew. That's the hometown of Philip. This is near the center of His area of ministry in the northern Galilee.

They come to Bethsaida. They brought a blind man to Him and begged Him to touch him. So He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the town.

And when He had spit on his eyes and put His hands on him, He asked him if he saw anything. And he looked up and said, I see men like trees walking. Then He put His hands on his eyes again and made him look up.

And he was restored and saw everyone clearly. Then He sent him away to his house, saying, Neither go into the town, nor tell anyone in the town. Now this seems like yet another manifestation of Jesus' compassion for those who had a physical disability.

It's an expression of the power of Jesus Christ over disease. It's an expression of the grace of God. But it also tells us something.

The location tells us something. The manner of this miracle tells us something. This is the one case where Jesus performed a miracle and the results were not instantaneous.

Jesus spit on His eyes, put His hands on Him, and the man received a sort of sight. He said, I see men like trees walking. And then Jesus laid hands on him again and he was fully restored.

Now, was Jesus tired that day and it just took a little extra divine power to heal Him? Probably not. There's a reason for this. Why is this a two-stage healing? Why does it occur in Bethsaida? Why is it a blind man? We're going to answer those questions in the context.

Scripture interprets itself. Questions that we have about Scripture are generally answered by looking at Scripture. What is Jesus trying to get across here? What has He just told the disciples? Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened? Having eyes, do you not see? There's an issue of spiritual blindness in Israel.

There's an issue of hardness of heart in Israel. And it's not hardness of heart over whether Jesus can do miracles. It's not hardness of heart over whether He is a good teacher.

It's hardness of heart over accepting and living in the light of the reality that Jesus teaches and preaches. To commit to the Lord, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul

and all your strength and to love your neighbor as yourself. It transcends any of the regulations of the Pharisees.

It transcends any of the experience, any of the expectations that the religious crowd in Israel has. It's a reality totally beyond human effort, human solutions, human abilities. But people are so caught up in their own reality that they're blind to the spiritual reality that Jesus brings.

Even Jesus' own disciples do not yet understand as Jesus tells them in verse 21. This blind man of Bethsaida is a picture of Jesus' disciples. That's why he's from Bethsaida.

That's where the earliest of Jesus' disciples are from. Peter and Andrew were the first to go follow John the Baptist and then to come to Jesus Christ. It was Andrew who brought Peter to the Lord.

Philip is also from Bethsaida. This blind man, what happens? Jesus takes the blind man. Does he heal him in Bethsaida? He takes him outside the village, doesn't he? He takes him away from the rest of the people.

He puts him in a category by himself and deals with him personally. We've seen in some of the previous coverage of the miracles on Wednesday night that when Jesus uses the saliva from his mouth in connection with the healing as he does in several places, it's symbolic. It represents something.

What is it that issues from Jesus' mouth? It's the word of truth. He himself embodies the word. We know that from John 1. That which issues from Jesus' mouth has healing power.

Jesus applies that to this blind man's condition. What comes from Jesus' mouth goes directly to his malady. And yet what happens? He spit on his eyes, put his hands on him, and asked him if he saw anything.

He looked up and said, I see men like trees walking. What's the nature of that observation? Can he see? Sort of. Can he identify what he sees? If he's looking at a man, can he tell it's a man? He can.

He says, I see people. They are in fact people. They're not camels.

They're not sheep. He sees people and they are people. He can correctly identify what he sees.

But he can't perceive their essential nature. He can't understand what they're doing. He said, I see people, but the people I see look like trees walking around, which makes no sense.

People look like trees. So, correct identification, but completely inadequate perception of those people and what they're doing. And that's important because that's where the disciples are.

How do we know this? Look on down in verse 27, right after this episode. Jesus and his disciples went out to the towns of Caesarea Philippi, and on the road he asked his disciples, saying to

them, who do men say that I am? So they answered, John the Baptist, but some say Elijah, and others, one of the prophets. He said to them, but who do you say that I am? Peter answered and said to him, you are the Christ.

Then he strictly warned them that they should tell no one about him. How strange. What is the question Jesus asks the blind man in verse 23? Do you see anything? What's the question he asks the disciples in verse 29? Who do you say that I am? Do you perceive who I am? When you look at me, do you see anything? And what is the answer that Peter gives? He gives the correct answer.

He gives the correct identification. You are the Christ. That's correct.

I see men. They are, in fact, men. But what's the problem with the blind man? His sight is only partial and inadequate.

He can identify things, but he can't see the details. He can't perceive their actions. He can't understand them and what they're doing clearly.

All he can do is identify what he's looking at. That's where the disciples are in their training with Jesus Christ. They have reached the point where they can identify Jesus Christ, but they still do not understand His function.

They can't perceive Him accurately. What's the solution for the blind man? Jesus goes back and puts His hands on the blind man a second time. And after that second application of the touch of Jesus Christ, he is restored and sees everyone clearly.

That's what Jesus is going to do with the disciples. This portion of His ministry is going to concentrate on the disciples. Jesus is going to lay His hands on them so that not only will they be able to identify Him, but they will understand Him, perceive Him clearly, and having gained that perception for themselves, be able to communicate it to others.

This is why Jesus strictly warns them in verse 30 that they should tell no one about Him. Why would that be? How could it possibly be wrong to proclaim Christ? We take that as a given. We look at Matthew 28, 19 and say that is our great commission to go and tell, proclaim Jesus Christ.

And Jesus says, you've identified Me, don't tell anyone. How can this possibly fit with our view of God's plan? Look at the blind man. Just because you have identified Jesus Christ does not mean you are qualified to communicate Him to others.

They need to have a clear perception. They need to understand Him just as this blind man. And we have evidence of this coming up right here in chapter 8. After He warns them to tell no one, look in verse 31, He began to teach them.

This is the means of application of the hands of Christ, if you will. What is the remedy for that

fuzzy vision? The touch of Jesus Christ. What is the remedy for this perception that needs refinement on the part of the disciples? He began to teach them.

It's the Word of God that we have in our hands and in our laps this morning that gives us the perception of that reality that God so much wants us to see and accept and live by. He began to teach them. That's what removes blindness.

That's what causes the scales to drop from our eyes. That's what frees us from bondage, from the shackles of human tradition, from the shackles of our own experience, the shackles of our sinful nature, the shackles that the world, the flesh, and the devil would seek to place upon us. Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.

It's God's truth that drops this blindness away from our eyes. He began to teach them what? He's refining their understanding and their perception of Himself as the Messiah. 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.

He spoke this Word openly. He spoke this Word plainly. There was no mistaking it.

He wants their vision to be clear. He wants them to perceive the way the blind man now perceives. But notice in verse 32, Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him.

Lord, what's all of this talk of rejection and being killed and dying and so forth? That's not necessary. There's no reason for that to take place. We've got a different perception of You.

We can keep this thing going. We can get a grassroots movement started. We can stay up here in Galilee and avoid these religious leaders.

There's no reason for this to end in rejection and death. If we play our cards right, this can be a great success. Look at the crowds that you've been gathering.

Look at that crowd at the foot of the mountain that wanted to make you king. If we just maneuver in the right way, if we say the right things and do the right things and stay out of the wrong places and avoid the wrong people, we can make this thing work. He began to rebuke the Lord.

And of course, we look at this and say, oh my goodness, how could anyone have such cheek? How could anyone have such gall to go and rebuke the Lord? In blindness, it's possible. In a fuzzy perception, you can walk up to a man and think that he's a tree walking around. You can misperceive and misunderstand and go off in a direction just like Peter who was by far the most advanced.

Peter and John had a greater understanding than any of the other disciples in terms of theology. Look at the mistakes that Peter makes. And so what does Jesus respond with in verse 33? When He had turned around and looked at His disciples.

Remember when we had the study about Jesus sighing? We saw how that is so often a picture of disappointment, of sorrow, of lack of perception and lack of understanding. Sometime when you're interested in something to focus your devotions on or focus your meditations on, get a concordance and look at the places in the Gospels where Jesus looks around. Those passages are so pregnant with meaning.

When Jesus looks around, it is not an idle action. It's not recorded in Scripture just to give us a flavor or atmosphere. It's there for a reason.

When Jesus looks around, He has the eyes of flaming fire in Revelation 1. His glance pierces to the very center of our being. It's a look of evaluation. It is a look of testing.

It's a look that says, where do you stand? How do you measure up to the standard of the reality that I am presenting to you, Jesus says. And when He looks around the circle of people in the house or when He looks around at His disciples here, it's an evaluation. It's saying, where do you stand? There's no cloud in Jesus' perception and He sees past our self-deceit.

He sees past the facade that we put up in front of others. He sees into the very center of our being. And when He looks around at us, He knows where we stand.

He knows which reality we accept. He turned around and looked at His disciples and said, rebuking Peter, get behind me, Satan, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men. You are living on a human reality, human solutions, human perceptions.

You think that rejection and punishment and death are impossible in God's plan, that that can't be the way God wants things to be. That can't be right. Rejection, death, impossible.

That's not the plan of God. We know better. Jesus has presented this as a part of God's great plan and they cannot see it.

And so Jesus rebukes Peter. Peter is like, he's the same one that just spoke earlier and said, you are the Christ. I see men like trees walking.

It's going to take a further application of the touch of Jesus Christ to bring Peter's vision into clear focus. Peter will go on to be one of the greatest ministers of the gospel in history. But at this point, he needs a further application of the touch of Jesus Christ.

He needs to be willing to set aside his view of reality and accept that which Jesus Christ is teaching. Teaching about the future. Teaching about the present.

Teaching about that unseen reality that forms the structure that guides God's plan through the ages. But it takes humility. It takes the recognition that we have fuzzy sight.

Many of us actually physically have fuzzy sight, don't we? And what happens? Some of us bump

into things and hurt ourselves because our vision isn't what it used to be. We can see the outlines of things. We can see the shadows of things.

We can see a blurred picture of things. But oh, how we long to have clear sight. How we long to be able to perceive clearly in the physical realm.

Do we have that same ambition in our spiritual life? Do we have a hunger and a yearning to perceive clearly that great spiritual reality that completely transcends this reality? That causes us to reinterpret and reevaluate the circumstances that we face. And even if they involve rejection, even if they involve a seeming death, lack of a future, do we see beyond that to the great forward movement of God's plan? Do we put faith in God and what He's doing? Faith is the evidence of things not seen. That's our challenge as believers.

That's our commission to walk in the light that Scripture provides us. Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. What is the great indictment of the Pharisees? Those who embodied what everyone thought was great religion and great following of God.

We don't have time to look there, but take a look in Matthew chapter 23 where Jesus delivers the seven woes to the Pharisees. What does He call them? Fools and blind. Blind guides.

In Matthew 15, I think, He talks about the blind leading the blind and both falling into the ditch. Blindness can afflict all of us. We are born blind and we need the touch of Jesus Christ to enable us to see and we have to want it.

That's our challenge. That's our commission. That's why Jesus Christ has left us the spirit to lead us into all truth, to open our eyes so that we can see visions of truth that God has for us.

Let's close in a word of prayer. Father, we thank You that You loved us enough to send Jesus Christ to die on our behalf. When we were completely lost in sin and had nothing to recommend us, no value, no hope, Jesus Christ as an expression of Your love came and for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross.

He expressed Your love. He is the greatest expression of that unseen reality that is our heritage and is our calling. We pray that the things we've looked at this morning will help us to see and live in the light of that reality.

We pray that Your Word will become the object of our faith, that Your power and Your presence will be active among us. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.