

“Do You See Anything”

Mark 8:11-38

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INTRODUCTION

I want us to start off this morning by thinking back to our school days. For some of you this will not take much thinking because you're still in your school days, but for others of us we may have to try just a little harder to think back because it's been awhile since we've been in our school days. Now as you think back I want you to recall your worst subject in school, the subject you struggled with most, the class you dreaded going to most, the course you thought you'd never make it through unless the Lord himself graciously gave you comprehension of the subject matter or the teacher graciously gave you a passing grade even though you didn't deserve it. What was that subject for you?

For me it was Geometry. I just didn't get geometry. I can't even tell all the reasons why I didn't get it...all I can tell you is that I did not get it! It didn't make sense to me. It didn't compute. Even when the teacher explained it to me and demonstrated it for me, I still didn't get it; which of course led me to fear and despise her trying to explain it to me. But not only was I embarrassed, I knew she was frustrated by my not getting it. I don't remember if she actually said it or not, but I'm sure she wanted to yell out on many occasions, 'You still don't get it?'... 'You still don't understand?'... 'Don't you see what I'm doing?' But I didn't. My geometrical eyesight was impaired.

A LESSON IN A BOAT

Now I mention all this not because the disciples in our passage are struggling with geometry. As a matter of fact, they're not struggling with math at all. When Jesus asked them to recall in *verses 19-20* how many baskets full of food they had picked up after the feeding of the five thousand and the four thousand, they quickly responded like good front row students – twelve and seven! No, they weren't struggling with numbers...numbers weren't their problem. If only they were struggling with numbers. But you see, they were struggling with something far greater. The subject the disciples were struggling with, the class in which they had the most difficulty was Jesus 101. What they didn't comprehend was the identity of Jesus. They weren't grasping clearly who he was. They had been with him. They had heard his teachings. They had seen

his miracles. And yet, they failed to grasp who it was that they were making known. They failed to recognize that in these things Jesus was beginning to disclose his identity as the one sent from God to bring life to the world.

Beware!

It's here in this passage before us that Jesus begins to call them on it. He chose to do this while taking a leisurely boat ride with them on the Sea of Galilee.

It's a boat ride that begins in *verse 13* with Jesus having just blown off a group of Pharisees who had been asking him for a sign from heaven to prove that he had really come from God, and was indeed doing the work of God. Mark tells us in *verse 12* that when these Pharisees asked Jesus for this sign *'he groaned or sighed deeply in his spirit.'* He groaned deeply at the Pharisees refusal to believe and grasp who he was. He groaned because they had failed to recognize the sign he had just preformed which was the feeding of four thousand! Now I mention this because it is important for us to realize that when Jesus got into the boat with his disciples, with his closest friends and pupils, he was already distressed at the rampant unbelief and lack of understanding of the people of Israel as exemplified in her leaders, the Pharisees. This deep groaning of Jesus is carried with him into the boat where the first thing he does is warn his disciples, to warn them against the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod. *'Watch out,'* he says, *'beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod.'* In other words, be on guard against the corrupting influence of first of all, hypocrisy...hypocrisy that's the result of a shallow and heartless morality, a morality that when you peeled back the veneer you found it to be only hollow. You see, the Pharisees were experts in putting on the mask of moral living, all the while neglecting the weightier matter of the heart. They were experts in substituting moral management for the abundant life that Jesus came to bring. And so Jesus tells his disciples, be aware of the leaven of the Pharisees. But he also says be aware of the corrupting influence of Herod, the corrupting of believing that life is only about our individual pursuits of self-made pleasure and security, of believing and acting as if life equaled excess and entertainment. Beware of both of these things, says Jesus, because both are leading you down a dead end, to the very opposite of that which I have come to bring and that is LIFE!

Putting it simply and generally, you and I are to be on guard against living only for ourselves, living only for what we have determined is right and good. We are to watch out for the leaven of being consumed by self-

centeredness, a self-centeredness that produces a lack of enthusiasm for God and his truth, that leads us to be hostile to God and disappointed with God when he and his way don't capitulate to your self-determined agendas. We are to be aware of the leaven that keeps us from seeing, from seeing God's great gift of abundant life, the great gift of the person of Jesus. My friends, any leaven, any corrupting influence that turns our eyes from Jesus, from who Jesus is and what Jesus has come to do is filled only with lies, lies that distract and lead only to our own demise. This was warning of Jesus.

Do you not yet understand?

But sadly it was a warning that the disciples missed. They missed it because they were more concerned about the fact that they didn't bring any extra bread with them, they were too distressed over the fact that they had only one loaf of bread for their little outing on the sea. The disciples were completely oblivious to Jesus' warning because they were too concerned about where their next meal was going to come from; their minds were so fixated on their lack of sustenance, that rather than hearing what Jesus was actually warning them about, all they heard, or thought they heard, was Jesus scolding them for not bringing enough bread.

Do you hear the sad irony in this? What has Jesus just accomplished? Well, he's just fed four thousand people with seven loaves of bread and some small fish. Two chapters earlier he had fed five thousand people with five loaves and two fish! And now here were the disciples worrying about the fact they had only one loaf of bread even though Jesus himself, who is the Bread of Life, was in the boat with them. They didn't get it. It's at this point that Jesus begins to get frustrated, to get frustrated with those who are closest to him. If he was distressed by the Pharisees' comprehension, we can only imagine how frustrated and hurt at his disciple's lack of comprehension. We can actually hear his deep hurt and frustration in the series of questions he asks his disciples in *verses 17-18*, ***'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...Do you not yet understand?'*** And it's with that penetrating question that the boat scene ends. It's a troubling question that doesn't get answered, but that's left there dangling before Jesus' disciples and before any person who encounters Jesus. It's a question that's left there for me and you to ponder – *Do you not yet understand? Do you still not get it?*

In our more honest moments we'd all have to admit that we struggle to answer this question, don't we? We struggle because it's so easy to lose

sight of Jesus, to be distracted by our own moral efforts at perfection or at the other extreme, to lose sight of Jesus because of our own immorality. It's so easy to be dulled or numbed by our frenzied pursuits of security and ease, of maintaining the status quo. It's easy for us to lose sight of Jesus in our times of excess as well as in our times of fearful lack. My friends, the dominant temptation in our lives is to lose sight of Jesus, to be convinced that we're on our own and we have to fend for ourselves. Have you lost sight of Jesus this morning? That's THE question, not only this morning, but every morning and every day of our lives. Are we seeing Jesus and his salvation as the necessary and central thing in our lives? Do you see Jesus?

AN EYE-OPENING LESSON

It's the question that Jesus' first disciples could not answer in the affirmative at this point in their following Jesus. You see, they were in the dark concerning the identity of Jesus. This put them in a position of needing an eye-opening experience, and that's exactly what Jesus intends to give them. For rather than brushing them off for their obtuseness, he, like a good teacher, gives them another lesson; a healing lesson, an eye-opening lesson that accomplishes its purpose in more ways than one. It's the lesson we find in *verses 22-26* when Jesus heals a blind man of his physical blindness. It's a unique lesson for it's a unique healing; it's a healing that's unlike any other healing in the Gospel in that it takes place in two stages. Rather than healing this blind man all at once Jesus' heals him in two attempts. Notice again how Mark tells the story in *verse 23*, he writes ***'Jesus took the blind man out of the village, put spit in his eyes, laid his hands on him, and then he asked the man, "Do you see anything?"'*** And the man responds, ***'I see men, but...but they look like trees, walking.'*** He had begun to see, but he wasn't yet seeing clearly. His vision was blurred. But then as *verse 25* tells us, ***'Jesus laid his hands on him again; he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.'*** His sight went from non-existent, to blurred, to perfectly clear. He now had 20/20 vision as a result of Jesus' healing.

Now I'm hoping that you see the connection; the connection with what took place earlier on the boat between Jesus and his disciples, and this eye-opening miracle of Jesus, especially with its emphasis on 'not seeing,' and with Jesus asking the blind man pointedly, as he has asked his disciples earlier, ***'Do you see anything?'*** Like the blind man, the disciples were in a state of blindness, not physical blindness, but spiritual blindness concerning the identity of Jesus and like the blind they too must have their eye sight restored, but rather than Jesus restoring their spiritual

eyesight all at once he chooses to do so gradually. Just as Jesus healed the blind man in stages, he is now going to begin to heal his disciples in stages.

That's what Mark begins to bring out for us in the remaining verses of our passage, verses that focuses on Peter's *blurry confession* and *Jesus' healing correction*, a healing correction that's intended to bring about restored sight which will in turn lead to right living.

A BLURRY CONFESSION AND A HEALING CORRECTION

As you look at the text, you'll notice that after healing the blind man Jesus purposefully leads his disciples to the city of Caesarea Philippi where he asks them to give a report concerning what the daily tabloids were saying about him, about his identity – *'Who do the people say that I am?'* They respond with the standard and popular images of the day concerning Jesus – John the Baptist, Elijah, one the prophets. But then he asks his disciples another question - *'But who do you say that I am?'* And there's good old Peter, that representative of the disciples, ready with the answer, *'You're the Christ...You're the Messiah...You're the King!'* And it was the right answer! Jesus is the Messiah, he is the King, he is the Christ, but notice...rather than praising Peter Jesus does something unexpected. He tells him to be quiet. *Verse 30* tells us that Jesus *'strictly charged them (that is Peter and all of the disciples) to tell no one about him.'* He silenced them and he silenced them because although Peter's confession was right, it was blurry, it was in need of being filled out, it was much like the blind man beginning to see, but not yet seeing fully. With this confession, Peter and the other disciples have begun to see Jesus' identity but not yet clearly. And that's why Jesus *'strictly charged them to tell no one about him'*. He didn't want them to speak about him until he could fill out their confession more fully, until he could lay his hands upon their spiritual eyes by telling them the rest of the story concerning what it meant for him to be the Messiah.

Now the disciples think they already know the rest story of what it meant for him to be the Messiah, and according to them it was a story that went something like this: if Jesus is the Messiah then he's come to win. He's come to bring us success. He's come to fulfill our pre-determined hopes and dreams. He's come to defeat our enemies and defeat them through military victory and violence. He's come to do for us what we expect him to do! For them, and for much of the rest of that society, this was the Messianic story. In many ways it still is the dominant Messianic Story, the story of wanting Jesus to fit into our own pre-determined agenda, of

wanting Jesus to do for us what we have decided is the best, of wanting Jesus to be our sugar daddy, of being the one who gives us everything we desire in order to have the life we've always dreamed about – to give us prosperity and success. But the problem is this is a false Messianic Story, and therefore it's not Jesus' Messianic story? For his story is much different. For his story was not one of fitting into the dominant Messianic Stories but of dismantling them. He didn't come to bring about worldly success; he came to bring life through death. His story was not one of domination, but of humiliation. He didn't come to win, to win through military victory and violence; he came to win through his own defeat. He came to suffer and die at the hands of his enemies. He didn't come to bring about our little self-centered kingdoms. No, he came to bring about God's large kingdom that's not centered on us but on him who is life.

Isn't this what *verse 31* is saying when it says that the Messiah is also the Suffering Son of Man who *'who must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed.'* And as it says in *verse 32*, he said this *'to them plainly.'* He couldn't have said it any clearer! HE CAME TO DIE. HE CAME TO SUFFER. HE CAME NOT TO TAKE THROUGH VIOLENT VICTORY BUT TO GIVE THROUGH HIS OWN VIOLENT DEATH. A death that was a **Divine must!** A death that was according to God's will, a death that had to happen if God's plan and purpose for the salvation of his people was to be accomplished. In other words, if life and freedom were to come, it could only come through the Messiah laying down his life for his people. No death on the cross for Jesus, no life for you and me!

Now one of the major reasons the disciples failed to see this, to see who Jesus was and what Jesus had come to do, was that they had misunderstood the problem. They thought the problem was out there, that it was that awful Roman Nation...and hence if Rome was the problem then the way to deal with it was through violence – defeat them or be defeated by them. But Jesus knew that Rome wasn't the real problem for the real problem ran much deeper than one particular nation. For the real problem was a problem that affected every nation, that affected everything and everyone – and that problem was sin. A sin problem that can't be defeated through violence - to others or to ourselves - for that'd only compound the problem, rather the problem of sin can only be defeated through sacrifice – through the sacrifice of him who is the true Christ, through him One who was sent by God in order to set up God's healing and life-giving Kingdom through his own death. Peter and the other disciples missed this. Their vision was blurry. They knew who the Messiah was but they misunderstood what he came to do. That teaches us

something: the person of Jesus can never be separated from the work of Jesus. As the Apostle Paul argued in *Acts 17*, if Jesus is the Christ, then it was necessary for him to suffer and then rise again. The person and the work of Jesus they must not be separated.

But that's the very thing Peter sought to do when he pulled Jesus aside and rebuked him for saying that was going to die. It's one of those scenes that makes you do a double take, doesn't it? Here Jesus says that it was necessary that he suffer, be rejected, and be killed. Then Peter pulls him aside and says, 'Jesus, I just said you're the Messiah and you should know that it's not necessary for the Messiah to die. Don't you know the story? Haven't you read your Bible? If you're the Messiah then the only thing that's necessary, the only thing that you *must* do is dominate, and then give us the proceeds.'

But Jesus will have none of this. You almost get the impression that before Peter can finish correcting Jesus, or while he was in the midst of correcting Jesus, Jesus cuts him off with a very forceful correction of his own. He says, *Get behind me Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.* He calls Peter Satan! Why? Because Peter, in trying to tell Jesus that it wasn't necessary for him to suffer and die, was in reality playing the role of Satan, the same role that Satan played when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness at the beginning of his ministry, when he tried to get Jesus to deny his Messianic vocation. Satan had sought to get Jesus to go another way than God's way, and now here is Peter, the chief disciple, seeking to get Jesus to go another way besides God's way! In doing so he was setting his mind on the ways of a humanity duped by Satan, a humanity that's in the dark concerning God and his ways. He was setting his mind on fallen human thoughts and not on God's.

You see my friends, anytime we remove the necessity of the cross, of the necessity that Jesus had to die, that it was a divine must that he be killed, then we can be sure that we're not setting our minds on the things of God but on things that are false and deadly. A cross-less Christianity is a deadly Christianity, but a Christianity where the cross is central is a Christianity that is full of forgiveness and life. If the cross is not central for you then you're not seeing Jesus rightly. Your vision is blurred...for the cross is THE controlling symbol for our being able to see Jesus' true identity as the Suffering King.

CONCLUSION

So how's your eyesight? Do you see anything when you look at Jesus? Do you know who he is and what he came to do in order to accomplish your salvation?

It's very interesting that in the Gospel of Mark no one sees Jesus correctly, that is, except for Jesus himself, God the Father and the demons. The Pharisees certainly didn't get him. The fickle crowds also didn't see him correctly. Even his disciples, those closest to him, didn't understand who he was. They would remain in this state until they began to understand he had come to die in their place so that they might have life in him.

In the Gospel of Mark there's only one place where we hear a human voice echo the Divine voice which was uttered at his baptism, *'This is my beloved Son.'* That human is the voice we hear in Mark 15, the voice that speaks from the foot of the cross, when a Roman centurion, an enemy according to the Jews, utters, *'Truly, this was God's Son.'* You see, it's only at the foot of the cross that we're able to utter a clear, rather than a blurry confession concerning who Jesus is and what it is that he's come to do. At the foot of the cross: It's the place where we must be in understanding Jesus, and it's the place we must never leave. It's only from this vantage point that we're able to understand, that we're able to see clearly, him who is our King, him who is the Suffering Messiah on behalf of his people. My friends, stand, stay at the foot of the cross and look up at the one who bled and died for you. 'Do you see anything?' Amen.