

Seeing Clearly
Mark 8:22-26
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I love hearing how people come to Christ, don't you? Here's the main point of our passage today: *The message of the gospel always remains the same but God uses different methods to reach different people.*

Let's try a little experiment. Can you shout out in one sentence what method God used to save you? I'll start. *God used the death of a friend and then my college roommate to share the gospel with me.*

Let me prime the pump with some responses I received to a post I put on Facebook this week. Here's what I wrote: *"I'm conducting an informal survey to find out what method God used to bring people to saving faith in Jesus Christ. It would help a lot if you could share in a sentence how you were saved."*

- *I was taken to church as a baby and around 7 years old I realized my need for Christ and salvation.*
- *I gained my walk with Christ through Celebrate Recovery at Edgewood.*
- *My grandfather led my sister and I to the Lord during a Sunday church service where the preaching was on hell.*
- *God allowed me to get to the lowest place I needed to be so my hard head would have no doubts it was Him that saved me from my mess of a life.*
- *A youth leader led me when I was 15. Yeah for youth leaders that don't give up!*

Who's next? Just raise your hand and I'll call on you. Remember...just give a one-sentence summary of the situation God used to save you.

Did you notice how God uses a variety of ways to reach a variety of people? That means that we shouldn't make the way he opened our eyes normative for everyone else. *The message of the gospel remains the same but God uses different methods to reach different people.*

Charles Spurgeon preached on passage at least three different times in his ministry. I read one of these sermons this week and loved his perspective: *"Had our Lord cast all His miracles in one mold men would have attached undue importance to*

the manner by which He worked, and would have surreptitiously thought more of it than the divine power by which the miracle was accomplished.”

For example, Jesus healed a number of blind individuals and used diverse methods.

- In Matthew 9, two blind men regained their sight when Jesus simply touched their eyes.
- In Matthew 12, we read that Jesus healed a blind and mute man but we're not told how.
- In Mark 8, a blind man named Bart could see after Jesus simply spoke a word.
- In John 9, a man who was born blind was healed after Jesus spat on the ground to make some mud and then this mud was put on his eyes. He still couldn't see until he went and washed in the pool of Siloam. This man gave a one-sentence summary of his transformation when he declared in John 9:25: ***“One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”***

By the way, since more than 90 people shared sentence summaries of how they were saved (between my wall and the church wall), I decided to sprinkle some of these sentences throughout the sermon. I was blown away by this response!

I'm hoping you'll be encouraged by the various methods God uses and if you're not saved yet, that you will repent, believe, and receive Jesus Christ today. Who knows, God might use this sermon to lead you to salvation!

- *After a car accident when I was 21 years old...I knew I would not have gone to Heaven if I died...*
- *He used a heavenly 2x4 across my head. And then, he brought wonderful believers into my life...it all started with one invite from a friend to "check out this church", which I reluctantly accepted, and the rest is His-story.*
- *I accepted Christ as my Savior at a summer Youth Camp.*
- *I chose to follow Jesus as a child and my mom led me to Christ. I had some years of wandering and living in deliberate sin and the death of my brother in law slapped me in the face with repentance and renewed commitment to the Lord.*
- *Jail, Cell 121. And a 90-year-old man coming to visit me every Sunday.*

The message of the gospel always remains the same but God uses different methods to reach different people. We'll totally see this in our passage today.

This mystifying miracle is found only in the Gospel of Mark and it's the only healing that takes place gradually as Jesus uses a two-step process to open the eyes of a blind man.

Turn to Mark 8:22-26 and listen to God's Word: "***And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, 'Do you see anything?' And he looked up and said, 'I see people, but they look like trees, walking.' Then Jesus 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.'***"

I see three truths that we can lock into from this passage.

- **Minister to those in misery**
- **Watch the Master show mercy**
- **Be motivated to live on mission**

1. Minister to those in misery. Check out verse 22: "***And they came to Bethsaida.***" This is a village on the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee, near the mouth of the upper Jordan River. It's where Philip, Peter and Andrew grew up. Some friends of a blind man find out Jesus has arrived so they do two things that we're called to do as well.

- **Bring people to Jesus.** Look at the next phrase, "***And some people brought to him a blind man...***" The word "***brought***" has the idea of carrying, so you know it takes them some effort. This is similar to what the four friends did for their paralyzed buddy when they tore the roof apart to lower him to the Lord in Mark 2:3
- **Beg Jesus to touch them.** After bringing this man to Jesus, they "***begged him to touch him.***" To "***beg***" means to "***to invite; to come to the side of.***" Now that their friend is in proximity to Jesus they start praying and pleading for Him to touch him.

Do you have friends who push you closer to Christ or are they pulling you away from Him? Who can you think of right now that God wants you to bring to Jesus?

Do you know of someone in misery? If so, it's time to minister by bringing them close to Jesus and then begin begging Him to touch your friend or family member.

These salvation sentences explain how important faithful friends are...

- *I was saved because I saw two people who were Christians and I wanted what they had.*
- *I ran into an old friend that was **NOTHING** like I remembered him, and he was literally glowing with joy! I had to have whatever he had, and what he had was Christ!*
- *We had some friends that wanted to take our daughter to church when she was six years old and we decided that we needed to be the ones to take our children to church. We went that Sunday and were saved that day after the pastor gave a very convicting message.*
- *A Halloween party invitation from a person I hadn't seen in years is directly responsible for the chain of events that lead to my salvation.*
- *I was saved because of the witness of a friend and the faithful prayers of an aunt and two cousins.*
- *People continuously showing up and speaking truth, even when I didn't want them to.*

2. Watch the Master show mercy. Don't you love watching what Jesus does? He is personal, He shows mercy in private and there's often a process involved.

- **Personal.** I love how personal the first part of verse 23 is as Christ makes physical contact with him: ***“And He took the blind man by the hand...”*** The sense of touch would be elevated for a blind person so this no doubt meant a lot to him. I imagine Jesus leading this man around potholes and people in his path. In our culture when you shake hands with someone, you are communicating warmth and openness but when you hold hands it's much more tender.

After my freshman year at Moody Bible Institute, I spent the summer in Zimbabwe, teaching at a Bible College. I stayed with the male students in a dormitory on the other end of the campus. After tossing and turning my first night because of both the heat and excitement of being there, I got up and made my way to the dining hall which was located on the other end of the soccer field. As I walked with the students, one young man came up to me

and took me by the hand and held on tightly. I was OK with this for about three seconds but then I started sweating and became uncomfortable.

I looked around and saw my American teammates laughing at me but then I looked at the smile on the face of the college student who was studying to be a pastor and recognized that this was his way of saying he wanted to be close to his teacher. When I realized it was a cultural expression of honor and respect, I relaxed and we walked all the way across the field holding hands. I should add that I got up early every day after this and sped across the field before anyone could hold my hand!

- **Private.** Just like he did for the deaf and mute man in Mark 7:33, Jesus ***“led him out of the village.”*** Listen. We grow when we get away and gather with God and His people. Abraham was taken away from Ur. Lot left Sodom and Gomorrah. Moses left Pharaoh’s household. Make sure you have alone time with Jesus. God brought you here today on purpose for His purposes. He knows you completely and you matter to Him. Jesus leads lost and blind sinners to Himself and we know from John 6:44 that if the Father doesn’t call us, we won’t come: ***“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.”***

We see how personal Jesus is and how He uses church gatherings for His purposes with some more salvation sentences.

- *Was saved as a freshman in high school at youth group led by Pastor Ed.*
- *My grandma and my youth group.*
- *I was seven years old at AWANA when I made an intentional decision to believe in my Savior who loves me unconditionally (even though I was very bad at memorizing Bible verses)!!!*
- *My husband’s faithful guiding led me to seek a relationship with the Lord. After a few months of attending Edgewood I was saved during a tithing message!*

Years ago I read a book entitled, *What’s Gone Wrong with the Harvest?* I came across what’s been called the Engel Scale that really helped me understand how Jesus moves people along a path toward salvation. This is very encouraging because if God can use me to help someone take the next step on the road to salvation, he can use anyone. That also means that I haven’t failed if the person doesn’t get saved. I also like this visual because it reminds me that my efforts

should not stop at conversion because we're called to make disciples, not just converts.

Jesus ministered personally and privately and with this man, we can see a process that He followed.

- **Process.** Let's spend some time now on the process Jesus used to bring sight to this blind man in verses 23-25. Everything Jesus does is intentional, deliberate and purposeful. This is no accident and we know there's not a problem with a lack of power on His part.

STAGE ONE

- ✓ ***“And when He had spit on His eyes...”*** Aren't you glad that we don't have to mimic this method today? Not sure how that would go over in an outreach event. Spit was thought to have medicinal properties...but it still feels gross to me. When I was young my mom would often lick her finger and put it on a cut I had. Maybe this is where she got the idea?
- ✓ ***“And laid His hands on him...”*** After the warm spit hits his eyes Jesus immediately uses His hands and touches him. Remember he couldn't see anything but could feel everything.
- ✓ ***“He asked him, ‘Do you see anything?’”*** Jesus asks him a question to get him to participate and to respond.
- ✓ ***“And He looked up and said, ‘I see people, but they look like trees, walking.’”*** This reminds me of the scene in *Lord of the Rings* when the “Ents” (trees) come to life and start walking around! It's interesting that the man knew what trees looked like, so maybe he had not been born blind.

Can you imagine what it was like to go from total darkness to bright light and to start seeing color and movement as unfocused images begin to pulsate through his previously deadened optic nerves?

The second phase of his healing takes place in verse 25.

STAGE TWO

- ✓ ***“Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again...”*** This is what his friends begged Jesus to do but He actually did much more – He took the man by the hand, He led him away, He spit on his eyes, He laid His hands on him, He asked him a question and then He laid His hands on him again. This reminds me of the time parents want Jesus to touch their children in Mark 10. Jesus does way more than that in verse 16: ***“And He took them in His arms and blessed them, laying His hands on them.”***
- ✓ ***“And he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.”*** The first thing he saw was Jesus. The Greek indicates that he saw and continued to see both near and far. The progression is vivid here – three different Greek words are used – he eyes are opened, his sight was restored and he saw everything clearly. The word for ***“clearly”*** means *“brightly, shining, resplendent.”* He could read the big letters on the eye chart and all the small ones, too! He probably started singing, *“I once was lost but now I’m found, was blind but now I see!”*

Don’t miss that healing the blind was a sign that Jesus was the promised Messiah or Savior. In other words, people would know that Jesus was the promised one because he fulfilled prophecy. Check out Isaiah 35:5: ***“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened...”*** In Luke 4:18-19 Jesus quotes another passage in Isaiah and tells His listeners that this 700-year old prophecy is being fulfilled in their hearing: ***“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind.”*** And in Luke 7:20-22, John the Baptist wants to make sure Jesus is who He says He is: ***“Are you the One who is to come or should we look for another?”*** Here’s what Jesus says: ***“Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight...”***

A Two-Step Miracle

Let’s ponder for a few minutes why Jesus may have done this miracle in two stages. Before listing some possibilities, we know it can’t be because of some lack of power on His part. On top of that, it’s really OK to not know and just rest in His

sweet sovereignty and accept His plans and purposes even if we don't fully understand. We should never put God in a box.

Knowing that any explanation is speculation, here are some possibilities.

- 1. To grow this man's weak faith.** Jesus didn't just want to restore his sight but to also transform his heart. As he started to see, his faith increased.
- 2. To show that Jesus ministers differently with different people.** This means you shouldn't try to copy someone else and it's a reminder that we don't all get better at the same rate or in the same way.
- 3. To let us know that Jesus longs to touch us more than once.** Some of us can give a sentence or two about our salvation but we've drifted in our discipleship. You might be saved but you're not sanctified, forgiven but not fruitful, or even a member and not living on mission. Don't think you're good to go when Jesus wants you to grow.
- 4. To remind us that God often does a little before He does a lot.** Zechariah 4:10 says to *"not despise the day of small things."*
- 5. To point us to the time we will see Jesus face to face.** 1 Corinthians 13:12 says, *"For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known."*
- 6. To teach and train the disciples.** When a text of Scripture is a bit difficult to understand, it's important to consider the context because a *text out of context is a pretext for a proof text*. Here's what we see when we do that. This passage essentially ends the first part of the Gospel of Mark where we've been focusing on Jesus as servant. The next section begins the presentation of Jesus as Savior. We'll pick back up in Mark in January.

In the previous passage Jesus basically told the disciples that they were blind. Look at verse 18: *"Having eyes do you not yet see?"* and in verse 21 He asks, *"Do you not yet understand?"* Then in the passage following this one, we read of Peter's confession of faith in verse 29: *"You are the Christ."*

Jesus is opening their eyes to the truth of who He is, and it's a process. They just needed to take the next step, just like us. What's your next step?

Here are some more salvation sentences that show a process...

- *After a life of really bad choices and tremendous guilt God pretty much kicked me and said "Hey.... follow me with all your heart and I'll break your*

chains that keep you in the hands of the enemy. You are my child and I will love you forever."

- *Though I had found all the worldly success, I had found no fulfillment in life, which led me to searching out God.*
- *God allowed me to get to the lowest place I needed to be so my hard head would have no doubts it was Him that saved me from my mess of a life.*

Let's summarize. *The message of the gospel always remains the same but God uses different methods to reach different people.* Minister to those in misery and then watch the Master show mercy. That leads to our final point.

3. Be motivated to live on mission. There's a positive and a negative command in verse 26. The man is told where to go and where not to go. The key is to obey, whether we understand it or not. Look at the first part of verse 26: ***"And he sent him to his home."*** Someone has said, *"If you want to change the world, go home and love your family."*

Shortly after I became a Christian, I read another book that radically transformed my understanding of evangelism called, *The Master's Plan for Making Disciples* by Win and Charles Arn. Their premise is built on the Greek word *oikos*, (not the Greek yogurt, which tastes like sour cream). *Oikos* is the New Testament word for "household." In English, "household" means the nuclear family. In Greek, however, its usage was much broader and included family, neighbors, co-workers, friends and those with whom we come into regular contact.

Each of us has an *oikos* made up of family, extended family, friends, neighbors and co-workers as well. This is our mission field. Studies show that 75-90% of people come to Christ through the influence of a friend or a family member.

I did a quick breakdown on the salvation sentences posted on Facebook on Thursday – more responses have come in since so it's not completely accurate. Almost 30% mention that it was a time of trouble that led them to Christ. Not quite a third mention the impact of a friend or family member and over a third came to Christ through the influence of a church service or student ministry.

On this Labor Day weekend, most of us are thinking about our jobs by taking a day off on Monday. I wonder what would happen if we started thinking of our work as a platform for witness and worship?

Here are a few more testimonies that show how God can use us where we work:

- *A persistent friend/co-worker kept inviting me to church and I finally caved.*
- *[An Edgewood member] was my co-worker at a bank. He witnessed to me every day about a God who loved me and wanted a relationship with me. He asked me one day where I thought I would go if I died that day. I knew! I asked God to forgive my sins and live in me that very afternoon!*
- *Through a special friend at work God brought me back to church, and into a life [growth] group where through worship music I came to saving faith.*

I came across a teaching series by Matt Chandler this past week on RightNow Media called, “Work as Worship.” I highly recommend it. Let’s watch this brief promo and if you’re interested you can watch the three-part series for free by opening an account through our website.

→ **Show promo for Chandler video.**

As we wrap up today, check out the last phrase of verse 26: ***“Do not even enter the village.”*** That seems harsh, doesn’t it? What was it about Bethsaida that made Jesus tell the man to stay away? Lots of miracles were done there but because of their hard hearts Jesus had pronounced a curse on this village in Matthew 11:21-22: ***“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the Day of Judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you.”***

Jesus had rejected them because they wouldn’t receive Him. They tuned Him out so He turned away. They had been given light but they gorged on the deeds of darkness. As a result the community was judged but individuals were still invited to respond. It sure feels like America has been judged, doesn’t it? We’ve turned away from His Word and His Ways. We’ll focus more on this in two weeks.

But there’s still time for you individually to respond...but don’t delay!

Do you have a salvation sentence? We all start out spiritually blind and have been given a sin sentence according to Romans 6:23: ***“For the wages of sin is death...”*** The man was honest when he couldn’t see clearly and he told Jesus, ***“I see men as trees walking around.”*** It’s time for you to be totally truthful about your condition. Admit that you are a sinner and repent from your sins.

It's time today to receive Jesus Christ so that you can see! Listen how Romans 6:23 ends: “...*but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*”

Here's one more salvation sentence: “*At the altar on my knees with a deacon leading me down the Romans road.*” I invite you to come up front and settle your salvation so you too can have a story to share.

Closing Song: “**O Great God**”