

SESSION SIX

The Revelation of Jesus: *Seeing Christ Clearly* (Mark 8:22-38)

“For the believing community . . . what is decisive is not merely confessing Jesus as Christ and Lord but also following him in obedient discipleship.” ~ Robert Stein, *Mark*, 412

I. Overview

This central section of the Gospel of Mark focuses on Jesus’ movement from his ministry in Galilee to his arrival in Jerusalem. This geographical movement carries more than a mere literal sense, as Mark utilizes this section to highlight discipleship as a journey. Thus, it should not be surprising that the disciples, not the crowds, are the focus throughout this section—a point made explicitly in 9:30-31. The framing of this portion of the narrative only further highlights this point! The two accounts of giving sight to a blind person (8:22-26; 10:45-52) serve as symbolical bookends. They represent the disciples’ failure to grasp Jesus’ true identity and mission. The disciples’ need for understanding only intensifies as Jesus now speaks openly of his impending death.

II. The Content

A. A Visual through the Healing of a Blind Man (8:22-26)

v. 22 - They expected Jesus to heal by a touch, as he had regularly done (1:31, 41; 5:23; 6:5; 7:33).

v. 23 - Similar to 7:33, Jesus removes the individual from the public forum, in order to heal in secrecy. The physical contact of spitting and touching his eyes would have been most meaningful to this blind man. Saliva was used to cure blindness in the ancient world (cf. Galen, *On Natural Faculties*, 3.7). The significance in the account, as well as in 7:33, indicated that it was *Jesus’* saliva which healed. Ultimately, it was Jesus who brought the healing—not the saliva.

vv. 24-25 - The reference to “seeing everything clearly” indicates that the reference to seeing people “walking around like trees” was the lack of distinct eyesight. Even though the healing took place in two stages, nonetheless, the healing was complete.

B. A Thorough Recognition of Jesus’ Identity (8:27-33)

v. 27a - Caesarea Philippi, formerly Paneas, derived its name from the local worship of Pan. This Hellenistic and pagan city was enlarged by Herod Philippi.

vv. 27b-28 - The question of Jesus’ identity is the central theme of the entire Gospel of Mark (cf. 1:27; 2:12; 4:41; 6:2, 14-16; 14:61; 15:2)! Here the disciples identified various public opinions concerning Jesus. While these views may have equated Jesus as a prophet or even a man with extreme supernatural abilities, these theories still fell short of Jesus’ true identity.

w. 29-30 - As spokesperson for the disciples, Peter declared Jesus as “the Christ”. This was the very title the narrative sought to show—Jesus is the Christ (1:1, 34). This revelation still entailed secrecy. As noted by one commentator, “The time for such public declaration will come in 14:61-62, but for now it is appropriate. When that time comes, it will be Jesus himself, not the disciples, who breaks the secrecy.” (France, *Mark*, 330).

v. 31 - Despite the prediction of rejection and death, the passage carries a triumphant message. Resurrection is promised in Jesus’ words to His disciples (This is true in all of Jesus’ passion predictions - 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34).

v. 32 - Peter’s understanding of “the Christ” would not have entailed defeat and death. Rather, Peter’s understanding would have echoed the common belief among first-century Jews that the Messiah is the one who would bring national liberation. Even the previous miracle would have reminded Peter of the Messiah’s ability to open the eyes of the blind when He comes (cf. Isa 35:5-6)! Unfortunately, Peter’s strong Christological statement in verse 29 has now been eclipsed by his own expectations and desires for Jesus.

v. 33 - The use of “satan” indicates that Peter expresses thoughts contrary to the Lord’s. All of those who oppose the will of God ultimately do Satan’s bidding. Peter is not Satan, but he is acting like the Prince of Darkness.

C. A Proper View of Discipleship (8:34-39)

v. 34 - “. . . *take up your cross* . . .” This command is more than simple endurance through hardship. The immediate context clearly indicates the possibility of literal death and shame.

“. . . *deny oneself* . . .” Jesus calls for a radical abandonment of one’s own identity and self-interests. As aptly noted by one scholar: “It is not the denial of something to the self, but the denial of the self itself.” (Best, *Following*, 38-39).

“. . . *follow me*.” While the previous two verbs speak of a particular occurrence in time, the Greek tense for “follow” indicates an ongoing action.

w. 35- 37 - Both questions in these two verses are left unanswered because the answer is most obvious. The answer is simply: “Nothing at all!”

v. 38 - The second reason for following Jesus is that denying Christ will result in Jesus denying that person at the final judgment.

III. The Intersect

Is there a particular area in your life that is hindering you from completely denying yourself and taking up your cross to follow Jesus? It could be a job, a desire for prestige or wealth, a concern for a particular family member, or a “cherished” sin.

What specific steps can you take to relinquish this hinderance? In order to answer this question, you will find below S.M.A.R.T. principles which can assist you in seeing concrete spiritual growth/change in your life:

S pecific

M easurable

A ttainable

R ealistic

T ime-determined

“Self-denial is never just a series of isolated acts of mortification or asceticism. It is not suicide, for there is an element of self-will even in that. To deny oneself is to be aware only of Christ and no more of self, to see only him goes before and no more the road which is too hard for us. Once more, all that self-denial can say is: ‘He leads the way, keep close to him.’”

~ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 88