

**Sermon preached by Reverend Jim Byrne at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian
Church, Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, May 5, 2013**

SEEING JESUS CLEARLY

Mark 8:22-26

²² Then they came to Bethesda, they brought a blind man to Jesus and asked him to touch him. ²³ He took the blind man by the hand and brought him outside of the village. Then he spit on his eyes, placed his hands on his eyes and asked, “Do you see anything?”

**²⁴ Regaining his sight, he said, “I see people but they look like trees walking.”
²⁵ Jesus put his hands on the man’s eyes again. And he opened his eyes. His sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. ²⁶ Jesus sent him home, saying, “Do not even go into the village.”**

To see clearly – to see Jesus clearly – that is the need of the generation of which our young people are a part. *To see Jesus clearly.*

Now, there was a man who was on his way to an appointment and he was late. He was about 15 minutes late for making a presentation and he raced into the parking lot and every spot was covered, every space was filled. And as he drove around that parking lot, he called out to God and he said, “God, if you will give me a parking space, I promise to you, I will go to church every Sunday this month, and I will give up drinking.” Immediately, a car pulled out of a parking space and he pulled into this parking space, looked up at God and said, “Never mind, I’ve found one.”

We are that man. I am that man. You are that man. Right now, the generation that we are looking at as young people are facing something our generation, my age and others, have never had to face. David Kinnamon, president of the Barna Group which does a tremendous amount of research on the church, said they’ve come to the conclusion that 65% of the young people in the U.S. have made a commitment to Jesus Christ. That’s the good news. The bad news is, in that same study, the Barna Group came to the conclusion that only 3% of that 65% have a Christian worldview. Of those that say they have a commitment to Jesus Christ, only 3% have what Barna Group would say is a Christian worldview.

Another drastic change in our culture is that through the polling they’ve done, they have discovered that one out of every three Americans now claim to be either agnostic, atheist, or nothing in particular when it comes to their faith. This is a *drastic* change from just ten years ago. The change has been unbelievable culturally and, I would say as one who grew up in high school going to youth group and was warned of the threat of secular humanism, it has now moved for our young people from secular humanism to a neo-paganism in our culture. What has changed for our young people is they’re being faced with paganism and the Christian worldview, even from Christians, is not there. This

shows, I would add, the need for ministries like the Fellows Program, for the youth family, and for youth ministries that are actively relationally discipling and modeling young people.

Let's look at this passage: *To see Jesus clearly*. The disciples didn't get it. They did not get it. At one point, Jesus even looks at them and says, "Why are you so dull?" Why are you so dull? In fact, this passage is pretty clear in the idea of understanding that in the New Testament that lameness, deafness and blindness are symbols of lameness spiritually, deafness, not being able to hear spiritually, and spiritual blindness. And that's what we have right here.

In this passage, you're faced with several different questions. And I've read many commentaries to talk about this passage. Some of the questions are: Why the secrecy? Why did Jesus pull this blind man out of Bethesda, out of the village to heal him? Why did he do it away from most people? And also, in the end, why did he say "don't even go back into the village?" And we see Jesus again and again telling people not to tell who he is. That's one question: Why the secrecy?

Another is: Why the saliva? Why did Jesus spit in his eyes? It seems bizarre to us and strange to us that Jesus would do it. He does it in John 9 with the blind man there where he makes mud. He also does it in Mark 7. He uses saliva. Why the saliva?

But then the bigger question is the *real* question: Why the two stages? This has never happened in any other healing episodes. Why were there two stages? Why did Jesus begin a healing and then not have it completely work? Did Jesus run out of power? Did the man not have enough faith? Was it something that Jesus *had* to try again? I don't think so.

Well, let's look at this. As I tell young people, whenever a young person has a question about the Bible, the answer is to look in the Bible at the context of the passage. Let the Bible interpret the Bible even though we have many great commentaries – and some that are not so great on the Internet. While we have so much information, instead let's look at *what the Bible says about the Bible to understand the Bible*. That's it.

Well, let's look at this. The Gospel According to Mark – the good news of Mark – my second favorite book of the Bible. My first is Romans. I love Romans, then it's Mark. I love the interactions that Jesus has with people. I love the book of Mark. The book of Mark was written in 66 A.D., it is believed, by John Mark, a close associate of Peter. And it was written during the period of Nero when there was intense persecution of the Roman Christians. It was intense. Nero, of course, as many of you know from history was an unchecked power and what he wanted to do was expand his palace. So he and his people had a fire set near the palace and burned down part of Rome so he could expand his own personal palace. Then he blamed the Christians for that fire and that began the punishment and persecution. In the midst of that, the book of Mark was written and sent to the Romans; it was directly addressed to the Roman Christians.

Mark is amazing in the fact that there are two main sections to the book of Mark. As it starts in chapter one it builds to the climax of chapter eight. In fact, the whole book directs you to chapter eight at the pinnacle because it takes you to the life of Peter and his experience when he makes the confession of faith. In this, Jesus asks Peter, “Who do men say that I am” and Peter says, “Some say you’re Elijah, some say you’re John the Baptist.” Jesus then asks him, “No, Peter, who do you say that I am?” And Peter says, “You are the Christ.” And then Jesus says, “It is the Holy Spirit that has shown you this. Don’t tell anybody.”

That’s the messianic secret: Don’t tell anybody. It’s mostly in the book of Mark. But, why did Jesus use the messianic secret? Why did it seem that he was telling demons not to say who he was? We would do the exact opposite; we would say that you *should* be telling people who he was. At that time, the messianic secret in that view of theology was this: that the expectation for the Jew and first century Palestine was that the messiah was going to become a military and political leader like David. That was their expectation and it was limited in their understanding but instead Jesus is so much more.

The messianic secret is a view that what had happened in the scripture was, you see, he didn’t want the paparazzi around, he didn’t want to go from healing to healing. He had a goal and his goal was to go to the Cross for my sins and for yours and not just go healing from place to place and have an earthly ministry but it was *to go to the Cross*.

The book of Mark points right to chapter eight when Peter makes that confession. From that point on, there is only one miracle except for the resurrection. Only one miracle and it is the miracle of a blind man being healed immediately – blind Bartimaeus. Sandwiched into between these two blind healings is the profession of faith. In fact, as I said, the disciples didn’t get it.

Let’s see what chapter eight says.

¹¹ The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, asking him for a sign from heaven, to test him. ¹² And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, “Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to this generation.” ¹³ And he left them, and getting into the boat again, he went across to the other side.

¹⁴ Now the disciples^[b] had forgotten to bring any bread; and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. ¹⁵ And he cautioned them, saying, “Watch out—beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod.”^[c] ¹⁶ They said to one another, “It is because we have no bread.” ¹⁷ And becoming aware of it, Jesus said to them, “Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? ¹⁸ Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear? And do you not remember? ¹⁹ When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?” They said to him, “Twelve.” ²⁰ “And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of

broken pieces did you collect?” And they said to him, “Seven.”²¹ Then he said to them, “Do you not yet understand?”

In the beginning of chapter eight, Jesus feeds 4,000 people with seven loaves and after he feeds those people, the Pharisees come to him and ask for a sign. Just like our parking man after he gets the sign, and doesn't know it's the sign. Jesus refuses to give a sign to the Pharisees.

Then Jesus and the disciples hop in a boat and go to Bethesda. And, Jesus says, watch out for the leaven of the Pharisees and the Herod people. Watch out for the leaven. Then Jesus climbed in the back of the boat and then probably went to sleep which is the way Jesus did it. Do you know what the disciples did when he did that? They said, “Uh-oh, who forgot the bread? Where's the bread? Philip, you were supposed to bring the bread.” Peter says, “Don't look at me, I'm sailing the boat.”

The fact of the matter is: The disciples didn't get it. They did not understand it. They were there. They knew about Jesus. They knew a little about understanding Jesus but they didn't know who Jesus was and they didn't understand what he was talking about. Immediately, they hop out of the boat and while they're there, Jesus says this,

Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened?¹⁸ Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear?

And then they hop out of the boat and who do they come face to face with? *A blind man.* A blind man. *What this was for was the disciples.* They went from being spiritually blind to being a little clear and understanding who Jesus was and then to being *crystal clear who Jesus was* when Peter said, *You are the Lord.*

We need to see Jesus clearly. We need to see Jesus Christ as who he is. In the New Testament the parallel of the blindness and the fogginess that this blind man had in seeing people looking like trees walking around was where the spiritual condition was of the disciples at that time. They were not sure exactly who Jesus was. There was a dullness, an uncertainty, and what happened was Jesus took a blind man and he took some spit and spit in his eyes and he healed him in stages as a symbol to those disciples to say, “Oh you see a little bit but you don't see clearly.”

I am that man. You are those men. We are the ones that see Jesus yet we still have a blindness – we still have a part of us where it's just not clear. We don't get it. We get a little bit of it but we don't get the whole thing about it and that's what the gradual sight was about it. Peter needed to know who Jesus was because he was to lead the Church, to be *the leader of the Church.* And he was partially blind spiritually. He did not understand. How much in our lives are we partially blind? How much in our lives do we see a little bit of Jesus but we don't see it clearly.

Oh, the young people of this generation, the young people that we work with, need to see Jesus clearly as I need to see Jesus clearly. Now, how do we do that? How do we practically open our eyes? How do we let Jesus touch our eyes?

Of course, the question of saliva brings a lot of that. I've read all the commentaries. I don't like what they say. Some say: well, that was the way of the healing of that day. The healers of that day would use a little bit of spit, a little bit of saliva, to make their methodology. I don't know about that.

Maybe it was the sign for this blind man to help him along, to help his faith. Maybe it was the sign like that as we look at a doctor with a stethoscope around the neck and a white jacket. Maybe that's what it was. I don't like all those explanations. The one I like the best is this: That sight and life come from Jesus, giving Himself – and a little bit of *Him* - to that man.

Now, of course, there were open fires all over in that period of time and ash would get into their eyes. And here is Jesus taking an individual out of Bethesda. Why did he come out of Bethesda? I'll tell you why. In Matthew 11 he condemns Bethesda. He says in Bethesda, "I've done so many miracles and you do not repent. I've done many miracles but woe to you Bethesda. If the miracles that happened to you in Bethesda had happened in Sodom, they would have repented."

So what Jesus did was to take this man out into the outskirts of Bethesda. Although he had committed not to do any more miracles in Bethesda, there was this man – this *one man* – and He led him by the hand and He pulled him out.

When we see clearly – when *we see Jesus clearly* – we see ourselves. When we know who God is, we know who we are. When we know who Jesus Christ is, then we know who we are. When we know who we are in Jesus Christ, then we see other people clearly.

But some of us are blind. Some of us are wearing that veil and do not see the Lord Jesus. We see part of Him. We compartmentalize Jesus. We see a little part. We keep Him on Sunday or we keep Him with this group of people. In young people now, they are known as me-isms. Me-isms. Do you know what that is? There's the me-ism that is on the track team. There's the me-ism that goes to church. There's a me-ism that is in that family. There are three different lives.

But most of us adults would have to admit that we have the very same thing: that we compartmentalize Jesus. Some of us push him away and don't let him show us who he really is.

Well, how do we open our eyes to Jesus? How do we do it? How do we understand? **I have three ways:**

1. *Life is changed from the inside out.* It is not about changing the external behavior but the transformation of the person totally. In fact, as I was praying about this passage in my own life for the Holy Spirit to touch me, and saying, “Lord Jesus, what do you want to show me from this passage,” I picked up a little book after I had prepared the sermon by Roy Hession, “That We See Jesus.” He says the Holy Spirit is not concerned with us being better *but that we repent*. The Holy Spirit is not concerned about our being better Christians or better people but that He comes into our lives and brings us to full repentance.

See, what happens in our generation is that we have spent more time as youth directors and adults in teaching the youth sin management than in the *transformation of the heart*. We’ve spent more time telling them the disciplines of what they should or should not do – the sin management – and trying to be just a little bit better rather than turning them to repenting to the Lord Jesus and seeing the need for total transformation.

2. *Faith is found when our faith is fixed on Him and not in the circumstances of life we have lived for so long.* When we see Jesus clearly, we are able to focus correctly on the circumstances or problems we have. What happens is that when we raise Jesus up, our problems become smaller. But, if we are spiritually blind, those problems become more of a problem. They take us over so, they become bigger and we’ve made Jesus more foggy or smaller. But the answer is to say, Wait! I’m not going to look at the circumstances. Instead, I’m going to look at Jesus Christ to frame or to focus those problems.

Are you like a pigeon? Have you ever seen a pigeon walk? They look silly when they walk, don’t they? I didn’t know this but pigeons have a problem with their eyes: they can’t focus when they’re walking. So what a pigeon has to do is to stop and refocus their eyes. That’s why they look so silly. But they have to refocus after every step. We’re like those pigeons. When we take our eyes off of Jesus Christ, or we’re spiritually blind, we don’t see Jesus; we see the circumstances. We have to stop and refocus.

You know, the best illustration that I have used this year with over 2000 young people is this: (holds up a \$20 bill) What do I have in my pocket right here? What is this? What’s the value of this? Twenty dollars? Good. This is valued at \$20, correct? What can you get for \$20? Two buckets of KFC, when it’s on special. About three gallons of gas. It’s got value, right?

Let’s look at value. If I take this same dollar bill that has value and crumple it up and throw it down. What’s it worth now? Still worth \$20. Now, if I kick on it and stomp on it, and I say, You stupid dollar bill! You don’t measure, you’re nothing to me, you don’t count! Has the value changed of that twenty dollar bill?

It’s a great message to say to young people that God has put a value on you that would be billions. Just because someone calls you something else or you don’t make a particular soccer team or you’re treated in some way that is wrong, it does not change the value that Jesus Christ has placed on each and every one of us. But sometimes, we’re

spiritually blind to that. We let other people tell us our value. We let other people and the way they treat us make us feel that that is what our value is.

Our value is that Jesus Christ died for us and has a plan for us beyond anything we can imagine.

3. *It is not about you. It is not about them. It's about Him.* It is not about *those* people. In this great city, that would be the other political party. It is not about them. It is about *Him*. A man that I used to work with – Lloyd Ogilvie of Hollywood Presbyterian – told this story: “A man came up to me and I said, ‘How are you, Frank?’ And he said ‘Well, I’m doing fine under these circumstances.’ And my response was, ‘What are *you* doing under these circumstances?’”

It sounds a little corny, maybe. *What are you doing under the circumstances?* Jesus Christ has put a value on you. Jesus Christ says you are of value. Jesus Christ has a plan for you. And, you’re going to let circumstances determine what you’re going to do?

Oh, if the people of this generation would open their eyes and see Jesus as Lord they will open their eyes and see people not as trees walking around but *as Jesus Christ sees them*.

And we will see revival occur.

Father in Heaven, thank you so much for your word. Thank you, Lord God, that we’re to repent, we’re not just to try that we’re to get better. Lord Jesus, forgive us when we’ve settled for foginess, we’ve settled for spiritual blindness in a world that is heading towards danger. I ask, Father God, that you will give our young people mentors – people they could look up to who would help them clear their eyes and see you, Lord Jesus. May we be people who would reflect You, would reflect Your glory, reflect Your grace and, as we lift You up, may young people and people of all ages be drawn to You as You, Father God, have a wonderful plan for us. Amen.

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