

# THE TURNING POINT

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Mark 8:22-33

## Introduction:

For almost three years, Jesus has been teaching and preaching, performing miracles and even raising the dead, in an effort to show His people, the Jewish people, that He is the promised Messiah. And the response of the people has been less than stellar. From those who ignored him, to the religious leaders who condemned him as an imposter, and everyone in between, the general attitude has been to refuse to accept Him as Messiah.

Even the disciples, his closest friends and followers, seemed confused most of the time about who He really was and what He was trying to accomplish. After three years, they are still trying to figure it out. But, near the end of those three years, after hundreds of miles travelled on foot, days that seemed like they would never end, and dealing with endless crowds of people, Jesus knew that the worst was still ahead. He knew that very soon, as he headed for Jerusalem for the Passover, the entire nation was going to turn against him, and he was going to be hung on a cross, where he would die a horrible and excruciatingly painful death.

We have arrived at a turning point in the life of Jesus. It is a turning point in his ministry and it is a turning point in the lives of the disciples. Review last week:

- Trip across the lake from the Decapolis to Magdala – the Pharisees demand for a sign from heaven.
- He refused to give them a sign and departed from them.
- Trip back across the lake from Magdala, this time to Bethsaida.
- The lesson about the leaven of the Pharisees and Herodians.
- His piercing question – “Do you not yet understand?” That question will become significant yet again in our passage today.

Now, in today’s text, we see Jesus trying to prepare his disciples for what lies ahead. We begin with yet another healing.

## A Blind Man Healed

In verses 22-26 we have another demonstration of Jesus’ compassion and his power over sickness and disease. But this is a miracle with a bit of a twist.

- A blind man is brought to Jesus – led there by friends who obviously cared about him and wanted to see him healed.
- They beg Jesus to touch him. He does, but not in the way they expected. He took him by the hand and led him out of the village.
- He spit on his eyes – that sounds gross, but perhaps not to the people who saw it. Even today, we see some sort of healing or cleansing power in saliva. When you cut yourself, it is automatic to put your finger in your mouth.
- He touched him and asked if he could see anything. Note his response... v. 24.
- He touched him again and then his vision was fully restored and he could see clearly.
- Jesus’ instruction – go home, do not go back into town.

I don’t know about you, but this account raises all kinds of questions in my mind – things I have wondered about for a long time.

- Why did Jesus take him outside the village?
- Why did he spit on his eyes?
- Why was he not healed immediately when Jesus first touched him?
- Why did Jesus not want him to go into the village?

I don’t have answers to all those questions, but let me make a couple of comments here. First, I think it is significant to note the various ways in which Jesus did miracles. Just think of the blind men he healed.

- Matt. 9 & Matt. 20 – he touched their eyes and they were healed
- Mark 10 – Bartimaeus – he simply spoke - “Go your way; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he recovered his sight...
- John 9 – he spit on the ground, made mud, applied it to the man’s eyes and sent him to the Pool of Siloam to wash to be healed.

It seems like no two miracles are the same. We need to be careful not to put Jesus in a box, expecting that he will work the same every

time. Even in our salvation experience, every situation is unique. Sometimes people get concerned that they did not feel the same things as someone else when God saved them...

The other question I would like to mention briefly at this point is why this miracle was done in a two-stage process. There are those who suggest that because of the increasing Satanic opposition that Jesus was facing and the nearness of the cross, that Jesus' power was fading and it took two tries to complete this healing. I say that is hogwash. To even suggest that Jesus was somehow limited in power is to take away from his divine nature.

Rather, the best suggestion I can find or come up with is that this healing was actually a kind of object lesson that shows something about what the disciples were going through and what we all face as we come to an understanding of Jesus and his work in our lives. We will come back to that later...

## **A Question of Utmost Importance**

Following the healing of this blind man, Jesus takes his disciples on another road trip, this time up north, heading to the region of Caesarea Philippi, which is right by the northern border of modern day Israel. It was a place of great darkness. The temple of the false god, Pan was there, who was worshipped in the most grotesque ways.

In the midst of the buildings and idols honoring the gods of the Greeks and Romans, there was a great cavern that reached deep down into the depths of the earth. At that time, you could not even see the bottom. Sacrifices would be made to the gods by throwing animals into that chasm, believing that it reached into the very fires of hell. Hence it came to be known as the "Gates of Hades" or Hell.

Mark says that on the way there, Jesus asked his disciples some questions. Luke does not even say where this incident happened; Matthew indicates that they were already there at Caesarea Philippi. Regardless, the incident is certainly connected with that region.

The question – who do people say that I am? Look at and discuss their answers – John, the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets...

A little aside – certainly none of this should be construed as suggesting that the people were thinking of reincarnation. That was never in the thinking of Jewish people. They were expecting a reappearance of Elijah, not a reincarnation in a different form.

Then Jesus makes it more personal – who do you say that I am? I wonder how long they thought about that, before Peter finally answered. This could have been only a few days, or maybe a couple of weeks, after that incident in the boat when the disciples were so confused about Jesus statement regarding the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod. At that time, Jesus had scolded them for their lack of understanding – "Do you not yet understand?"

In spite of the fuzziness of their thinking and understanding, Peter finally comes up with the answer, "You are the Christ." Matthew adds, "the Son of the living God." He also records an affirmation by Jesus that Peter is correct in his answer, but then He tells them to not tell anyone about Him. Why would he do that?

I believe He told them to be quiet about all this because they were still not clear about who He really was. Yes, they had come to the conclusion that He was the Messiah, but their understanding about what that meant and the truth about what he was to suffer was still beyond their grasp. Had they gone out to spread the Word that the Messiah was now here, would have been spreading false hope, because they understood the Messiah to be a conquering warrior not a suffering servant.

That becomes evident in the next section, which we need to quickly look at. We see here...

## **A Disturbing Revelation**

*Read vv. 31-32a* – over the next few days, Jesus spoke plainly to his disciples three times about his impending death at the hands of the Jewish religious leaders – here, and again in 9:30-32 and 10:32-34.

But the disciples did not want to hear about it. Their understanding of the Messiah was that he would be a great warrior. He would lead Israel in victory over all their enemies and would establish a kingdom, which he would rule from the throne of David in Jerusalem. What they

didn't understand was that before the Messiah would come as a victorious warrior, he would first appear as a suffering servant.

Because of their misunderstanding regarding the ministry of the Messiah, Peter takes Jesus aside to correct Him – “Jesus, you've got it all wrong.” Matthew records Peter as saying, “Far be it from you, Lord. This shall never happen to you.”

The idea of their Messiah suffering and being beaten and rejected, and ultimately put to death was just way beyond their ability to understand. They seemed to completely miss the last little phrase that is in each of these declarations – after three days he would rise again. All they could hear was that he was going to be killed. And that just didn't fit with their plan.

Jesus response – v. 33. Peter thought he was doing the right thing, defending Jesus, but he was playing right into the devil's schemes. He didn't understand the plan of God, but was thinking only in human terms. Now it seems clear why Jesus didn't want him going out spreading the word about Jesus being the Christ, the Messiah – his thinking was still not clear.

## Conclusion

Well, it is time to find the application for us in this passage. It is at this point that I would like to go back to the healing of the blind man and the question of why Jesus used the process he did to heal the man.

*(Help from ESV Study Bible and other sources including Pastor Alan Carr)*

Earlier I said that this healing was a kind of object lesson that shows something about what the disciples were going through and what we all face as we come to an understanding of Jesus and his work in our lives.

This blind man is a living illustration of the spiritual condition of the disciples. Ever since they had been walking with the Lord, he had been using one shocking, miraculous event after another to teach them that He was the Messiah, the very Son of God.

They had seen Him heal the sick, cast out demons, raise the dead, walk on water, and multiply bread and fish, along with many other powerful proofs of His identity and deity. But, they never did quite get it!

They did not understand who Jesus really was and they would not understand until after his death and resurrection, when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost and opened their eyes to so many of the things that Jesus had taught them during those years.

I believe in the plenary and verbal inspiration of the Scriptures. I believe that everything in the Bible is there for a reason and it is no accident that Mark chose to record this particular healing incident and it is no accident that it is placed right where it is in his account.

In the previous passage, as Jesus talked to his disciples about the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod, he said – vv. 17-18, 21. He is asking them, “Can't you see? Do you not understand? Are you blind?” Then after this incident, He asked them the question, “Who do you say that I am?” They had the answer, but were still unclear about his identity.

Just like the healing of the blind man, the opening of their spiritual eyes was a process. When He first called them to follow him, they were like the man in v. 22 – blind. Now, after Jesus touching them for the past three years they are like the man in v. 24 – they see but vaguely, their vision is still fuzzy. But He is not finished with them. His goal is to touch them, to see them grow to be like the man in v. 25 – seeing clearly.

That is our Lord's goal for every one of His children! When the Lord first begins to work with us, we are totally blind in our sinful condition. Jesus brings conviction to open our spiritual eyes and point us to Jesus. When we come to Jesus and are saved, we are like the man in this miracle. We see, but we do not see clearly. Like Paul said in **1 Cor.**

**13:12, “...we see in a mirror, dimly...”** But as we spend time with Him in His Word and in prayer, He develops our spiritual sight. He causes us to **“...grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...”** **2 Pet. 3:18.**

Sometimes, we are still like the disciples, aren't we? The Lord has proven His power and His glory to us in more ways than we can name, and sometimes we still don't get it. We have seen Him do the impossible, the incredible and the astounding time after time and we still doubt. He has touched us on more than one occasion. May the Lord help us to believe and have our eyes opened to see the truth clearly.