

# The Gospel According to Mark - A Steep Learning Curve

**February 17th, 2019**

**A Steep Learning Curve Mark 8:22-26**

Verse one of that song says, "You called me out of darkness!" That is true and so Biblical. But here's my question for you today...Have you responded to God's call to leave the darkness and walk in the light? The price for your adoption was paid in full by the shed blood of Jesus and He offers to you to take His name, along with all the rights that belong to a family member! Jesus was offering this to His disciples, but there was a steep learning curve for them to understand what all of this meant. Jesus used a miracle to help teach them what it means to belong to Christ! To wear the name Christian, which means "little Christ." Let's pray and ask God to help us learn the same lessons. Pray.

Scriptures are best understood in their context. In other words, look at the big picture Read the Scripture preceding your text and following. Think about the time, the place, and the culture. Let's review the context of today's passage. Today's Scripture is sandwiched between Jesus' statements about the disciples inability to see, hear or understand, which we talked about in last week's message, and Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ, which we'll talk about next week.

Growing in our faith is a process, but God is patient! Aren't you glad God is a patient God? I sure am! He's been so patient with me and willing to teach me and guide me!

Let's read our text and think about this as we read our text...

Jesus Allowed a Miracle to Become a Teaching Tool

Mark 8:22 They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him.

Mark 8:23 He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?"

Mark 8:24 He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around."

Mark 8:25 Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.

Mark 8:26 Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't go into the village."

Let's first look at...

## The Details

This blind man, like the deaf and dumb man, was brought to Jesus by people who cared about the blind man's need. Jesus, not wanting to make a spectacle of the man, took him outside the village away from the crowd. Jesus once again used personal touch to deliver healing.

Why did the healing come in stages? Did Jesus mess up the first time? We'll talk about this in a moment. Was it a lack of faith on the blind man's part? Watch your theology here.

Theology – "What you think about God"

It matters what you think about God and the meaning of Scriptures. Some people think a person's healing depends on the amount of faith the person has. I disagree!

Faith Does Matter

Mat 13:57 And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor."

Mat 13:58 And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.

Notice "lack of faith" not "amount of faith"

All six times Jesus spoke of little faith, it was concerning the disciples and only once had to do with healing! It was more an indication that the disciples still had a steep learning curve in their spiritual growth and understanding of faith not the size or amount of their faith.

Let's look at the one exception...

Mat 17:14 When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus and knelt before him.

Mat 17:15 "Lord, have mercy on my son," he said. "He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water.

Mat 17:16 I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him."

Mat 17:17 "O unbelieving and perverse generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me."

Mat 17:18 Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was healed from that moment.

Mat 17:19 Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, "Why couldn't we drive it out?"

Mat 17:20 He replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

Several things to notice here! First, Jesus says the reason they couldn't drive out the demon was because they had so little faith, but then immediately states that it only takes a extremely small amount of faith, as small as a mustard seed! So He may have been trying to relate to them that their problem was not the size of their faith, but that their faith was misplaced. What? Listen to their question again:

Mat 17:19 Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, "Why couldn't we drive it out?"

Why couldn't we drive it out? There are some things that only God can do, and driving out a demon is one of them. Maybe they were more focused on what they could do rather than on what God could do.

I've said it before, let me say it again...

It's not about how big your faith is, it's how big the God is in whom you place your mustard seed of faith.

And notice that Jesus questioned the faith of the disciples not the sick boy or his father!

Many people have been hurt through the years by false doctrine and bad theology in the faith arena! Remember...

Doctrine is – Your understanding of Christ's teachings

Theology is – What you think about God

Sometimes people leave a gathering not healed, and they are led to believe it is because they didn't have enough faith. Jesus might have more questions for the faith healer than the person who needed the healing! How tragic that instead of being led to understand that God loves them and wants to be with them in and through their difficult journey in this life, they are led to believe God rejected their request for healing and help because they didn't have enough faith, and therefore they weren't good enough or strong enough to merit God's intervention! Sometimes God chooses not to heal and I don't know why. But here some things God has taught me down through the years.

Miracles are not just a thing of the past and sometimes God grants a miraculous healing and I don't believe it's wrong to ask for that! However, I also believe it's good to ask for God's will to be done realizing that even if a physical healing is not granted, there may be greater miracles than physical healing that God wants to work in a person's life. Miracles of relationship healing between individuals, and boy have I seen that, and miracles of developing a personal relationship between The God of the Universe and a human being in great need, and yes, I've seen that as well! There's also the miracle of learning to trust God's power, strength and presence even in difficult circumstances! Jesus was painfully aware that for some, if they got their physical healing, the relationship was over. They simply went back to their regular routine and forgot all about God. And Jesus knew the greatest need of any human being is a relationship with their Creator God! Luke's Gospel helps shed some light on this matter...

Luke 17:11 Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee.

Luke 17:12 As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance

Luke 17:13 and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

Luke 17:14 When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.

Luke 17:15 One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice.

Luke 17:16 He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him--and he was a Samaritan.

Luke 17:17 Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?"  
Luke 17:18 Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"  
Luke 17:19 Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

I want to share some of my personal beliefs on this subject, but they are not just my opinion, they are based, I believe on truths found in God's Word...

Sickness and death were not a part of God's original plan for humankind!  
We live in a fallen world and will not be completely free from its effects until we leave this world and enter into God's eternal rest!  
Sometimes God sets aside the normal and allows for the miraculous in this life!  
We must pray and then trust God with the outcome! God will answer our prayer . . .  
Sometimes with a miraculous healing!  
Sometimes with a miraculous grace and strength to faithfully endure the hardship!  
Sometimes God chooses to bring permanent healing by calling someone home to heaven where they will never face sickness, pain, or death ever again!

I said this a few weeks ago: Lazarus was raised from the dead, but he is not here on this earth today. Physical healing is not permanent until we reach the glories of heaven. Now let me say something you might be surprised to hear a preacher say...

"Sometimes it's good to be a skeptic"

People who aren't skeptical at all are likely to fall for anything. But never forget this: An honest, thinking skeptic, always leaves room for truth when he or she sees it.

This may seem mean spirited, and I don't mean it that way, but I remember years ago listening to a television preacher who was preaching that if you only had enough faith God would always heal you if you asked for healing and then as he went to read another Scripture to prove his point, he put on his reading glasses. I just couldn't overlook the irony! And then there's people who think it's a lack of faith to go to the doctor and there have been tragic results. Look, do your part and let God do His part! I go to the doctor! I believe God has given them a calling in life to learn all they can to help bring healing to people using medicines, surgeries, therapy, and good advice about lifestyle and nutrition. I try to exercise, eat right and take care of my body, which is the temple of God. I wear a seatbelt! I wear hearing and eye protection when operating power tools. Again, I do my part, and I put the rest in God's hands. It's called living by faith and trusting God to give you the strength and health to accomplish your God-given purposes in this life and then trusting Him to get you to your eternal home at just the right time!

Paul weighs in on the subject in his second letter to the Corinthian Church...

2 Cor 12:7 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.  
2 Cor 12:8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.  
2 Cor 12:9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

Many scholars think it was Paul's eyesight. Five times Paul mentions writing with his own hands as if it were a difficulty

Gal 6:11 See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!

Whatever Paul's thorn in the flesh was, God chose not to take it away or heal it. God chose instead to use that thorn to remind Paul of God's Grace, God's power, and that Paul would always need both of those things in large amounts! Jesus was trying to teach the disciples of their need for God's grace and God's power if they were going to accomplish God's purposes in their lives. Jesus knew He was going to be ascending back to heaven after the crucifixion and resurrection, and the disciples were going to be left in charge of the Gospel and would be responsible for launching the New Testament Church. They had to learn the lessons and they needed to get it right. Their dependence would have to be upon God and not on their own abilities. So with that in mind let's look at how these details inform the lessons Jesus was trying to get past the disciples steep learning curves!

## **A Two Stage Healing**

Did Jesus Mess Up The First Time? No - Look at the context. The story of Jesus and the blind man is a picture of Jesus and the disciples. Jesus was teaching a lesson to His disciples. And what lesson would that be? Actually more than one! Let's read our text one more time...

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The disciples needed to understand that salvation and forgiveness come when Jesus is invited into a person's life, done, however, spiritual healing is a process. Spiritual growth is a process. It's a process built on a personal relationship with God. The disciples needed to see they were like the blind man, spiritually blind and in need of healing! And we are like the disciples, in need of spiritual healing! Like the blind man, as you begin your relationship with God you'll begin to see some things, but it may not be crystal clear at first. You won't understand everything overnight! Becoming a follower of Jesus, a disciple is a two stage process! The first stage is accepting Jesus' offer to forgive you of your sins and to save your soul by becoming your Savior! The second is allowing Jesus to begin the life-long process of transforming the direction and purpose of your life through His Lordship! Here's what you need to do, here's what the disciples needed to do: Let Jesus take your hand, let Jesus lead you, let Jesus speak God's Word of truth into your life, let Jesus place His hand upon your life, and then follow His instructions for life!

### **I believe Jesus is saying to us: "Take My Hand"**

Mark 8:23 He took the blind man by the hand...

Jesus took the blind man's hand! Jesus wanted the disciples to take His hand! Jesus wants us to take His hand! Jesus is reaching out His hand to you this morning! Will you take His hand by inviting Him to be a part of your life and by accepting the forgiveness and love He died to give you? Remember, the hand Jesus is reaching out to you is nail pierced! He already paid the price for your salvation. Take His hand and you'll be amazed at the places He'll take you! But you might be thinking you're too far gone and have sinned to the point that God wouldn't want to take your hand. God has a word for you through Paul the Apostle...

1 Tim 1:15 Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst.

1 Tim 1:16 But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

What did Paul just say? For those who would believe on Him, they would receive eternal life! Are you willing to place your hand in His?

### **I believe Jesus is saying to us: "Trust Me To Lead You"**

Mark 8:23 He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village.

Once you let Jesus take your hand, He will begin leading your life! He will begin guiding your life! This is significant! How does He do this? By His Spirit and by His Word!

#### *Led By His Spirit*

He led the blind man out of the city for many reasons, but one of the most important was He didn't want the blind man to be a spectacle. He cared for the blind man and his dignity! You can be sure of this: God cares about you and His leadership of your life will reflect that! He led the disciples daily as they followed Him and He wanted them to continue to trust His leadership into the future. He desires to lead you and me and in order for Him to do that we must have faith in His ability and trust His intentions and motives! When we allow Jesus to take our hand and lead us, He does so by way of The Holy Spirit! The Psalmist put it this way...

Psa 139:7 Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

Psa 139:8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

Psa 139:9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea,  
Psa 139:10 even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

And then listen to these words a few verses down where the Psalmist ask to be led of God...

Psa 139:23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.  
Psa 139:24 See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

And you can write this down: The Holy Spirit will never ever contradict the Word of God as revealed in Holy Scripture! So we know God wants us to be...

### *Led By His Word*

Mark 8:23 He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?"  
Mark 8:24 He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around."

For some folks this seems so unhygienic! Why would Jesus do this? Jesus used spit on three occasions. Once to heal a man who could not speak or hear, where He touched the man's tongue with saliva, once for a man born blind, where He mixed spit with clay and touched the mans eyes and this story where He spits directly into the man's eyes. I agree with Biblical Scholar Ray C. Stedman who states in his expository study of this passage that the spit was symbolic of The Word of God. You might wonder how so. Both spit and words come from the mouth! Jesus was the Word made flesh, as we read from John's Gospel a few weeks ago...

John 1:14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

And when Jesus was being tempted by Satan, Jesus quoted this Scripture...

Mat 4:4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

The writer of Hebrews tells us...

Heb 11:3 By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

So the very creation was spoken into existence by the Word of God from the mouth of God! Jesus was using His spittle as a tangible teaching tool to show the disciples that it is the truth of God's Word that heals spiritual blindness!

**I believe Jesus is saying to us: "Allow Me to Touch Your Blinded Eyes With My Healing Touch!"**

Mark 8:25 Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.

Jesus knew what the blind man needed/Jesus knew what the disciples needed/Jesus knows what you need

In fact Jesus once told His disciples this...

Mat 6:7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.

Mat 6:8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Are you willing to trust what God says you need the most is what you need the most? If physical healing is what you need the most, God can give you that! If it's spiritual healing, God will give you that! I guess the biggest question for all of us is this:

Am I willing to trust God with my very life?

The disciples learning curve was steep! What about yours and mine? Are we willing to let Jesus take our hand? Are we willing to let Him lead us by His Spirit and through His Word? Have you ever thought about

the trust a blind person puts in someone when they allow them to take them by the hand and lead them? They are quite literally putting their life in that person's hand! Are you willing to trust Jesus today by putting your hand in His and allowing Him to save you, to lead you, and to begin the process of healing your spiritual blindness? Maybe we should just join the Psalmist in His prayer...

Psa 143:8 Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul.

Psa 143:9 Rescue me from my enemies, O LORD, for I hide myself in you.

Psa 143:10 Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground.

Psa 143:11 For your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my life; in your righteousness, bring me out of trouble.

Let's pray!!