

Men walking as trees

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Preacher: Rev K.M.Macdonald

[0 : 00] Are you with me now for a short moment for the chapter that we read, Mark chapter 8, and I would like to look at verses 22 to 26, the healing of this blind man by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Mark chapter 8 verses 22 to 26, and Jesus cometh to Bethsaida, and they bring a blind man unto him, and they sought him to touch him.

And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town, and when he had spat on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw aught. And he looked up and said, I see men as trees walking.

After that, he put his hands upon his eyes, and made him look up. And he was restored, and saw every man clearly. And he sent him away to his house, saying, Neither go into the town, nor tell it to any in the town.

This miracle is only recorded for us by Mark himself. And there are some peculiarities about this telling, about this miracle, that it shares with the miracle of the healing of the deaf and dumb man, which Mark tells us about in the previous chapter.

[1 : 15] Jesus, one of the things is that Jesus takes the sufferer away from the crowd, and performs the miracle in privacy. Both miracles were done in privacy.

And then again, Jesus uses the touch of his hands, and uses his fingers, and his own saliva. That is, he uses his own spittle in bringing about the cure.

And also, Jesus commands both men to keep quiet about the miracle, not to tell about healing. But this miracle here, this miracle of making the blind man of Bethsaida, he stands alone amongst all the miracles of Jesus, in that it is performed in stages.

The power which at every time seems to work in an instant of time. Like Lazarus comes forth, like Lazarus comes forth, and the dead man, the dead Lazarus, rises, and comes immediately out of the grave.

Jesus says, peace, peace, still, and the wind and the waves stop, and there's a great calm. But that power here, which at other times, as I say, acted instantly, seems here to work slowly.

[2 : 26] And the miracle is done in stages. The cure doesn't come in an instant of time at all. Christ stops halfway through performing this miracle, and he asks if there's any progress being made.

It is like a doctor who's not overly sure of his diagnosis, or is not overly sure of the effect that the medicine, or the drug, or the cure may have.

And when Christ is told that there is a slight improvement, that the man is able to see dimly, the treatment is repeated, and the recovery is complete.

Well, there are three things about this miracle that need explaining. Three things that we must look at more closely. Why, in the first instance, did Jesus take the blind man out of the town, away from the crowd?

Why did he take him out into the country? He just didn't take him into a corner. He took him away out into the country, outside the town altogether. And then why did Jesus use things like his own touch, and like his own saliva, in order to perform the miracle cure?

[3 : 35] And then third, why did he perform the cure in stages? Well, first of all, we read, he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of town.

Now, Jesus never performed miracles as a public show. Miracles were never a show-off in Jesus' life. Never done to bring a reaction from the audience.

Never done to please the gallery of onlookers. He didn't even respond to requests to perform miracles. He just ignored those requests that were made in order to impress.

No, the miracles were always the answer of a sympathetic heart to a needy situation. Jesus saw man's needs, and Jesus reacted and performed a miracle.

And it wasn't really the cold proof of his own power that we see at all, but the reaction of a compassionate heart to man's situation, to man's sorrow, to man's need.

[4 : 42] Wherever Jesus came into contact with sorrow and with sickness and disability, he reacted to it, and he did something about it. But not with show. He did it quietly, drawing a veil, as it were, over his gone good work.

And that's what he teaches us to do as well. He says, when you do something good, let not your left hand know what your right hand do is. He wants us to do good. He wants us to respond to need. But he wants us to do it quietly, without a fanfare, without a great show, without looking for man's acclaim. Doing it for the Lord Jesus himself. He knows everything that we do.

But this leading of the blind man out of town into the country is more than his normal desire to keep things quiet. More than his normal desire that things should be done quietly.

And we have to look away from Jesus. We have to look at the man, the man's situation, in order to get the answer to it. We have to look at this blind man. And Mark doesn't tell us much about this blind man.

[5 : 48] But we can learn a little from the story as we read it. First of all, the man came from Bethsaida. And Bethsaida was a non-Jewish area.

So the man here was more than likely to be a Gentile. And then the second thing we see about him is that he didn't come of his own accord. He wasn't like Bartimaeus at all, who came and who shouted to Jesus.

This man was brought to Jesus. They bring a blind man to him. His friends had to bring him to Jesus. And then the third thing we see is that he didn't ask Jesus for anything.

Because it was his friends that said they besought him to touch him. His friends had to even pray to Jesus. This blind man asked for nothing. There he stands, helplessly, listless, hopeless, probably bitter and sullen, if we read into the story.

He wasn't too keen on coming because the rest had to bring him. He couldn't believe that anyone could help him. Far less this Jewish rabbi. He doesn't expect anything good.

[6 : 58] He doesn't even lend his voice to the prayers of his friends. He doesn't even call out asking for help. So Jesus looks at him.

And Jesus, you can almost think, speaking with respect, that Jesus wonders, Now how am I going to reach this man? How am I going to reach this cold, listless heart? There's no use talking to him. His attitude shows the uselessness of talk. His eyes are shut. He cannot see the sympathetic, compassionate, tenderness of Christ's gaze as Christ looked at him.

He was blind to the sympathetic understanding that is Christ. But there was one thing possible. One way that the Lord Jesus Christ could communicate with this man, he took the blind man by the hand.

He touched him. And in spite of his sullenness, in spite of his bitterness, in spite of his hopelessness, in spite of all the thoughts that were churning around in this man, that man realized that when Jesus touched him, that this was no special sort of passing touch.

[8 : 08] That this was a special touch. That this was no just passing touch. It was a special touch. Here is someone who has a genuine interest in me. Not just a passing, useless, formal show for the sake of those watching.

This is someone who really cares. So surely this would begin to build up an expectant hope in this blind man. The grasping of his unbelieving limp hand, which was hanging by his side, was a token of hope in the darkness which was this man's world.

The touch of the hand of the Lord Jesus Christ in his world of darkness. And do we not have here, in miniature, a picture of what the Lord Jesus Christ does to fallen man?

Is this not what happens to us? Are we not blind? Are we not groping about in darkness? Are we sometimes not bitter and sullen and hopeless? Are we not blind? And suddenly the hand of the Lord Jesus Christ reaches out.

And he touches us. And a thrill of excitement goes through us. As we realize that there is more to life than just what we have been seeing in the darkness. Is this not what he did when he came into this world as a babe at Bethlehem? Did he not come into the darkness of the world? Did he not leave the glory of heaven where he was the most loved son there?

[9 : 35] And did he not reach out to sinful man in the same way as he reaches out here? Is it not just the mystery of Christ becoming man in the way that he took the blind man by the hand?

Every Christian here knows that that's what happened. But out of nowhere the voice of Christ, the hand of Christ came and led them away from the darkness.

So having established contact with this man and having kindled in his heart a little flame of hope, Jesus gently leads him out of town. Leads him out of the village, leads him away from his friends, leads him away from the place that he knows, leads him away into the unknown as far as this blind man was concerned.

What a picture we have here of Jesus leading a blind man by the hand, away from what he knows, away into the unknown.

Ah, but Christ often has to do this to the sinner before he restores him his sight. Step by step the blind man went with Jesus, each step taking him further and further away from what he knew, each step taking him further away from his friends, away from his familiar things, each step making him more dependent on Jesus, making him more dependent on this stranger.

[11:09] What was his thought? Where is this man going to take me? I am completely at his mercy. But only the gentle but firm touch of Jesus kept him from running off in a blind panic.

But the expectation and the surrender to Jesus were just the faint beginnings of the faith that Jesus was looking for.

The faint beginnings of the faith that Jesus was gently leading him to. Well, sometimes my friends, in the midst of perplexing situations, in sorrow, in sickness, in bereavement, Jesus leads his people into the unknown. Where they are alone with him.

Where our very solitude opens their eyes and we see only Jesus. And we see Jesus in those moments of solitude in a way that we had never seen him before when we were surrounded by crowds, when we were surrounded by the familiar things, when we were surrounded by the ordinary things of life.

You see, our outward lives are so busy. Our outward lives are so surrounded by the clouds. We are so much part of life that we are jammed up one against the other.

[12:35] The hurry and pleasure of life are so great that we cannot find outward secrecy or astrology. We are born as part of a crowd and we live in a crowd all our days.

And yet there are times when even in the midst of all the numbers that surround us, we are alone. Oh, it's so alone. The night before we go into hospital, we are alone.

Particularly when we're waking up maybe three, four in the morning with nothing ahead of us but the unknown of the hospital. We are alone. We are alone the day of an operation.

Nobody else can go through it for you and you are absolutely alone at the mercy of strangers and you feel alone, so alone. The widow in the home after the swarms of mourners have gone home. They know what aloneness is. But the thing is, my friends, that every single person in all the numbers that flock out towns and cities, every person has to face the facts of life and the facts of death on his own.

[14:03] Alone he lives. Alone he dies. Alone he has to give an account to his maker. Alone he has to stand before the judge of all the earth and give an account of his life.

Oh, my friends, in such moments of realization, of solitude, in those moments of aloneness, when there's nobody else that you can reach to, reach out the hand of your heart and grasp the hand of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Hear his voice as he speaks to you. Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. There was no sadness, no dreariness in the solitude outside the town, when it was Christ that took the blind man by the hand and led him out of town.

Then the second point you see is, why did Jesus use touch and saliva to perform the miracle? The name of Christ here, you could say, stooping in order to use material things to perform a miracle. His power could have done it. He could have done it with one flash of his glory. But he stoops to use ordinary things like his own touch and like his own spit to perform a miracle.

[15:29] Ah, but you see, this man again, this man had no faith to begin with. He didn't expect to be cured. He didn't come with any expectation. But the touch of the hand, the finger moistened with saliva, the pause to question, and then the repeated application.

Did this not make a ladder for his puny faith to start going upward? Was this not the ladder that this man could sort of build his hope and confidence on, to a climb up, to a real appreciation of the blessing that he was going to receive, and the blessing he did receive?

Do you not see here how Jesus stoops to a feeble faith, and reaches down to the feeble faith, and gives it a ladder to climb up to a proper understanding of himself?

When he was approaching his crucifixion, approaching the time when he was to leave the world, he looked at those who were around him, and he saw a pretty pathetic little group of people.

He saw men of average faith. He knew the persecution, he knew the trouble that they were going to go through. And he gave them a comfort in order that they would climb into a higher knowledge of strength.

[16:55] He gave them the Lord's Supper to strengthen and comfort them. He gave them ordinary, everyday things that were freely available to everybody there, as bread and wine.

Things they could see, things they could touch, things they could taste. Ordinary things, but proclaiming things that are unseen and eternal.

The eye of my weak, troubled faith, sees in the bread, the body of Jesus broken for me.

In the wine, the blood of Jesus spilt for me. These provided by the Lord Jesus Christ himself in condescension to our weakness, in order that we will be able to rise above ourselves.

That's a ladder by which the soul may climb to God himself. In Christ's touch and in Christ's saliva, there was healing.

[18:06] But if they healed, it was not because of anything specific in them, but because Christ willed so. Christ willed. He himself, you see, is the source of all heavenly blessings.

He himself is the source of all healing. And as we come to the Lord's table in a little while, as we taste the bread, as we drink the wine, as we obey him, as he tells us, do this in remembrance of me.

Let us rid ourselves of any reliance whatsoever we may have upon the sacrament itself. And let us raise our eyes to the Lord Jesus Christ.

To the Saviour who died on Calvary that we could be saved. A Saviour who's alive, who's alive forevermore. Who's now at the right hand of power. That's why he's at the right hand.

At the right hand of power. A Saviour who's walking amongst the candlesticks. Walking amongst his church. Supervising. He is the pastor.

[19:11] He is the one who walks amongst us. A Saviour who's returning in glory one day. In order to take his people home.

Thirdly then and finally, why did Jesus perform the miracle in stages? Jesus having led the blind man out of town. And having put saliva on his eyes.

He stops and he asks, do you see anything? And the blind man answers that he sees blurred figures. He knows they're men. Only because they're moving.

Because they're walking. So Jesus again put his hands on the man's eyes. And made him look up. And he was restored. And he says that he saw every man clearly. You see, Jesus was putting a brick on his power.

Jesus was holding back his power. To allow for the slowness of the man's face. He was healed slowly. Because he believed slowly.

[20:12] Christ worked on the principle according to your faith be it unto you. As a mother walked slowly to keep step with her little child. So Jesus keeps step with the sinner who is making faith.

Poltering steps towards him. He walked slowly here. He went slowly and gently. Because this man was going slowly.

Oh how patiently the Lord Jesus Christ keeps step with us. How dimly we see when we first set out. When we first set out in our Christian lives.

How dimly we see everything. How little a new convert really knows about God. He can't really say what this turmoil within him.

What this peace. What this smile on his face is all about. All he knows is that yesterday was blind. Today he sees. But he cannot explain or write a thesis on it.

[21:14] He cannot bring theological arguments to bear. All he can say is I don't know. I was blind yesterday. Now I see. Things are different. Christian progress you see.

Doesn't consist of seeing new things. But in seeing the old things more clearly. It's our sight that's getting better.

We begin by seeing things dimly. And through a glass darkly. And slowly but surely the Lord Jesus Christ takes us on. Until our eyes get better and better.

That is our spiritual eyes. The same Christ. The same cross. The same cross. The same cross. But more distinctly seen as we grow in maturity.

More deeply understood. More closely affecting us. More closely taken into our hearts.

[22 : 16] You see the first lesson we get. Is the very very last lesson we learn. That Jesus died for us. That Jesus is the Savior. He is the Alpha and the Omega.

The beginning and the end. He is the first and the last. Tell me the old old story. Of one thing, in things above. Of Jesus and his glory. Of Jesus and his love.

Tell me the story simply. As to a little child. For I am weak and weary. And helpless and defiled. Tell me the story slowly. That I may take it in.

That wonderful redemption. God's remedy for sin. Tell me the story often. For I forget so soon. The early dew of morning has passed away at noon.

Tell me the story softly. With earnest tones and grave. Remember I am the sinner whom Jesus came to save. Tell me the story always.

[23 : 16] If you would really be. In any time of trouble. A comforter to me. Tell me the same old story. When you have caused to fear. That this world's empty glory is costing me too dear.

Yes. And when the world's glory shall dawn upon my soul. Tell me the old, old story. Christ Jesus makes thee whole.

The same story. Christ died. We see it more clearly as we go on. We used to accept it absolutely easily. Now we marvel. Now we're standing further back in awe and wonder.

As we begin to see more clearly. The Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ. Death at Calgary. So my friends. Don't fret. About your progress.

Don't fret. That you're not going as fast as you ought to. Don't fret. That other Christians seem to be so much more spiritual than you. Don't fret. If you don't know the theology of things.

[24 : 17] Jesus Christ has you by the hand. He is walking by your side. He won't leave you behind. He won't forget about you.

He will lead you through this life. And you will see the faint glimmerings of life as you begin. And one day he will lead you right through life. Out of this town. Out of this village of the world.

And he will lead you into his own country. And he will say to you. Did you see art? And he might touch your eyes. And you'll open your eyes. And you'll see him. You'll see your savior.

You'll see my savior. Your eyes will be opened. You won't see through a glass darkly anymore. But you'll see him face to face.

May we all catch a glimpse of him. As we come to his table this morning. Let us pray. O Lord of heaven and earth.

[25 : 18] We praise thee for thy word. And we ask that each one of us would be able more and more. To gain a closer walk with thee. We give thee thanks that thou didst reach out of the darkness.

For each one of us. And we pray that if there is anybody still in darkness in this church. O may they see the hand of the Lord Jesus Christ reaching out to them. In love and in mercy.

Draw near to us now. Help us to do everything with dignity and good order. Bless the hearts of the people as they come to the Lord's table. Bless the hearts of those who are watching.

To their eternal welfare we pray thee. That they may see and understand that once they were blind. That there is a restoration of sight in Jesus.

For his sake we ask it. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Now just a few words for the fencing of the table.

[26 : 18] It is something that we as a church do. There is no scriptural warrant for it. But we do it in order to clear up any misunderstanding that people may have. And for the good order of Christ's own church.

I just want to say one or two very very quick things. That the Lord's table is for the Lord's people. If you have no interest in the cause of Christ. If you have no interest in Christ himself.

If you know the story but it does have no concern to you. If your heart doesn't pound at the thought of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then you are not to come to this table.

If you do not know or realize yet what Christ has done for you. If you have no idea about your own sin. If you have no idea that Christ died for your sin. Yes he died for the sins of others.

He died for the sins of many many people. He died for the sins of a multitude that no man can number. But if you don't know that he died for your sins. If you can't see that your sins put him on

that cross.

[27 : 20] If you can't take it as a personal thing. Then the table is not for you. If you are quite happy to sit where you are away from the table. If you are quite happy to sit and watch and see what's going on.

Then the table is not for you. If you have affection for a private sin. And you know about it. If you are clinging to it and you are still thinking that you are a Christian.

That you should be at the Lord's table. If you have an affection for it. If you are not saying that you are troubled by sin. Because we all are troubled by sin. But if you have an affection for sin. If you hold on to a sin because you like it.

And you are not going to give it up because you like it. You are tendering to yourself. By keeping this private sin. Then the table is not for you. You cannot have a bit of your heart for the world.

And the rest of your heart for Christ. He says I must be king in all of your heart. But if you are sitting there. And you know the Lord Jesus Christ as your savior.

[28 : 19] If you are able to see Christ on Calvary dying for your sins. If you realize that without Christ saving you. You are lost. Then my friend. The table is for you.

And you have no right to sit away from it. Because it is a duty laid upon you by Christ. Are you my friend? Then do this in remembrance of me. Do you love me?

Then do this in remembrance of me. Do you believe I am your savior? Then do this in remembrance of me. Look at the cross. I died for you. God says what more can I do?

I gave my son to die. What more can I do? Believe it. And do this in remembrance of me. And as we come to the table.

As the Lord people come to the table. Let us hear his command. The necessity of appropriation.

Take it he tells us. We obey him. Because we love him.

[29 : 17] Because he first loved us. And all our hopes rest upon him. Amen.