

# THE RADICAL RABBI: A RADICAL DEMONSTRATION

(Mark 8:22-26)

10.24.21

## INTRODUCTION

Our story today is found in the eighth chapter of the gospel of Mark. Now Mark is an interesting book. A couple of things: Of the four gospels — Matthew, Mark, Luke and John — Mark is the shortest. And of the four, Mark is thought to have been written third — after Matthew and Luke. The material itself was inspired by the recollections of Mark’s mentor, Peter, who ministered in Rome in the last years of his life.

Now there were very different audiences targeted by the gospel authors. Matthew, for instance, was written to a Jewish audience; that’s why none of the four gospels have as many references to the Old Testament as he does. He was trying to prove that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah of Old Testament scriptures; He was the One to whom all those ancient prophecies pointed. Now by contrast, Mark was written to a Gentile audience in general, and likely to a Roman audience in particular. A study of Mark in which I once participated was called “The Go Gospel,” due to its narrative style of racing from one event to another. By one count, Mark uses the word “immediately” 41 times to quickly move his gospel along. Mark’s is a story of action and power — traits that would have been very appealing to its Roman, Gentile audience. Did you know that there are more miracles of Jesus reported in Mark than in any other gospel? And one final little tidbit: There aren’t a whole lot of stories within Mark’s gospel that are unique to him. Matthew’s gospel covers about 90% of Mark’s material, Luke’s some 50%.

But today’s story is unique. Of the four gospels, Mark is the only one that tells of this particular ministry moment of Jesus. So as we begin, **let’s start with a word of prayer.**

## TEXT (Mark 8:22-26)

*They [Jesus and the disciples] came to Bethsaida — Mark 8:22a.*

If we remember from our last story from our Radical Rabbi, Jesus had just finished a dispute with the Pharisees and Sadducees concerning His giving them a sign from heaven. Following that, He and His disciples had gotten back in their boat and had traveled northeast across the Sea of Galilee, arriving at Bethsaida. It was during that crossing that Jesus provided a teaching moment for the disciples, both about the false teachings of the Jewish leadership AND His never-ending ability to provide for their needs, reminding them of the miracles, the works of Jesus, that they had so recently witnessed with their own eyes. Our story today picks up from their landing in Bethsaida.

*[S]ome people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him — Mark 8:22b.*

There was nothing unusual about this; people were ALWAYS bringing those in need of healing to Jesus. By this point in time, Jesus’ reputation as a healer was well known, as was His compassion for all those brought to Him.

But there is a subtle sweetness in this verse, that these people (whoever they were) were committed to bringing this man to Jesus. They had to be. He may not have been able to accomplish this connection on his own. These people evidently cared about this man, and

that concern translated into an action: They “brought” him to Jesus. And then, having done that, they also interceded on this man’s behalf, the text telling us that they “begged” Jesus to touch him, meaning to heal him. In the Greek, they were imploring Jesus to come near to this man; they were literally inviting His presence with a spirit of desperation and intense conviction. They knew what Christ’s touch could mean.

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

For some reason, which the text does not explain, Jesus desired to accomplish this moment out of the sight of anybody else. Was this unusual? In the textual record of the New Testament, yes, it is. From what we can read, Jesus was most often surrounded by hundreds, if not thousands, of people when He did His healings. But obviously we only know what the authors were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write. A moment like this may have happened many times before; we simply don’t know that. But it certainly happened here. Why? Well, if it’s not in the written record, it is mere conjecture, but a desire to avoid unnecessary publicity may have been a reasonable thought. Jesus was very intentional and transparent in not wanting His works to overshadow His words; they were meant to complement, not compete. The power of His works was meant to convey the power of His words, and to be an additional testimony as to who Jesus of Nazareth truly was.

It also may have been for a far more troubling reason; we have these words from Matthew’s gospel: ***Then Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of His miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you” — Matthew 11:20-22.*** Simply put, it appears possible that judgment had already been pronounced on Bethsaida for its lack of response to the evidence of Jesus as specifically presented through His miracles. If that was the case, then it is also possible that no more evidence, such as this impending miracle, would be given.

***When He had spit on the man’s eyes and put His hands on him, Jesus asked, “Do you see anything?” He looked up and said, “I see people; they look like trees walking around” — Mark 8:23b-24.***

Here we see another unique factor in this healing. There’s a process taking place here; it was occurring in stages. The gospels record by one count a total of seven specific healings of the blind (so not counting the incidents of massive, general multiple healings that included healings of the blind), but this was the only one of those specific healings that occurred like this. Of course, Jesus wasn’t tied to any kind of methodology; style-wise, He could heal however He wanted.

I can relate to this part of the process. When I was a little kid, I once had an eye condition called “conjunctivitis,” sometimes referred to as “pink eye.” One result of that condition for me was that my eyes had an unusual amount of discharge or tearing, and also had a great build-up of crust around my eyes. Well, one morning I woke up, but my eyes were

matted entirely shut; I couldn't open them at all. It felt like they were glued down. My mom had to take a warm, damp cloth and gently swab across my eyes to remove all that "gunk" so I could actually open my eyelids and see again. It didn't hurt, but it was a weird moment. One commentary I read suggested something like that may have been happening here, pointing to the fact that Jesus used His own saliva and His hands on the man's eyes.

Whether that was actually the case we simply don't know, but we do know that this man was not born blind; he responded to Jesus' question about what he could see by describing people looking "like trees walking around," suggesting that he must have acquired his blindness either through injury or illness at some later point in his life.

But then Jesus more decisively asserted Himself: ***Once more Jesus put His hands on the man's eyes — Mark 8:25a.*** Now there may have been a "faith" reason why Jesus healed this particular man in stages. Perhaps the faith exhibited by the crowd in bringing this man to Jesus wasn't shared by this guy at all. So, Jesus, in His perfect perception of every situation and every heart, brought the guy only part of the way to healing, to see how he would respond. Maybe there was an implication of: "OK; I've brought you this far. Do you believe that I can bring you and your eyesight the rest of the way as well? What do you believe I am capable of doing?"

***Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly — Mark 8:25b.***

And then, in an instant, this man's full, complete and perfect vision was restored. The miracle was complete.

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

The impression left by Christ's command is that this guy was not specifically from the village of Bethsaida; Jesus specifies to go home, but simultaneously orders that his journey home does not include the village itself. One can also get the sense that, while this man appears to be free to tell his wonderful story to the people back home — wherever that is — Jesus does not want him sharing anything of this miracle with the people of Bethsaida, lending some additional credence to the idea that, as far as Jesus was concerned, judgment for their continued unbelief had already been pronounced.

## **APPLICATION**

Another great story of love, empathy, compassion, power, and grace, all wrapped up in these few moments between this guy and Christ. And there are a few takeaways from this wonderful and unique story that are important to bring into our own lives these 2,000 years later:

First, the Son of God is obviously just as creative and imaginative as His Father. He is not bound by any of our ideas of what is appropriate, nor is He bound by any ways He has done something in the past. So, we can never assume two things: (1) that how God did something before is how He is going to do it again, and (2) just because He worked in a certain way in someone else's life doesn't mean that He is going to work that way in our life. He is going to do precisely and perfectly what He sees as the best match for our

particular circumstances in our particular lives. And He never misses! So don't get either upset or mystified that God chooses to work in some other way in some other life different than how He worked in your life. Nobody knows the outcome He has in mind better than Him. Solomon once famously wrote: ***Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding — Proverbs 3:5.*** Part of trusting God is to leave ourselves completely without limit in His perfect and loving hands. He will not fail!

Second, we so often talk about God's amazing grace and His everlasting love. We kneel in awe beneath the cross, recognizing what Jesus did on behalf of the Father simply to accomplish the miracle of salvation. But all of that amazing grace has a limit; it has a time frame. At some point in a time only God knows, grace will be done — and the village of Bethsaida pictures that truth. They had been presented a picture of God's love and grace like no other picture ever — in the actual, physical presence of God's own Son, Jesus Christ. But they rejected that portrait; the proof was in their lack of repentance. So, Jesus directed this healed man to go home, but to go home while avoiding Bethsaida. No more grace was to be shown — God's response to their hearts.

The implication is clear. The apostle Peter famously made it very plain that God is exceedingly patient with the sin and the sinners in this world, writing in some of the last words of his life: ***[D]o not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. Instead He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*** [But then come His next words:] ***But the day of the Lord will come — II Peter 3:8-10a.*** In other words, at some point in time, that patience will come to an end. What we need to remember is that there is a hell, there is a lake of fire, that will exist for all eternity, populated by people who dared let their sin run longer than God's grace. That truth should give us all the reason we need for urgency in sharing the gospel.

Third, there is a profoundly clear picture given to us as people came to Jesus with their different illnesses, injuries, and issues. When it comes to life on earth, just as His father was the original manufacturer, Jesus was His complete and equal partner as a manufacturer; in fact, the apostle John wrote in the introductory words of his gospel that ***Jesus was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made — John 1:2-3.*** And Paul told the Colossian church the same thing, and then added something really cool when he said: ***For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him — Paul, Colossians 1:19,*** meaning that God found complete joy to have all his own creative skills and powers dwell in his Son. So bringing somebody who was suffering from blindness to Jesus was bringing them directly to the one who designed, created and delivered both the eyeballs and the miracle of vision they provide. And their own scriptures would have confirmed that, as Solomon made note of: ***Ears that hear and eyes that see — the Lord has made them both — Proverbs 20:12.***

But for this guy, his eyes were no longer working. It was a devastatingly simple picture of the impact of sin on the world. God created a perfect place — nothing broken, nothing

failing. But one thing — sin, man’s free-will choice to oppose God’s direction in favor of his own — corrupted all of that. So, in a scenario that was repeated countless times during His time on earth, Jesus gave us a picture of what coming to Him — what coming ONLY to Him — could accomplish. Only He could fix what sin had broken; only He could cleanse what sin had corrupted; only He could heal what sin had sickened. Healing, physically and spiritually, began and ended with Jesus Christ. They still do.

## CONCLUSION

And the greatest takeaway of all? This miracle identifies exactly who Jesus of Nazareth, this completely Radical Rabbi, truly was — and is. Again, the provider of this ID came from their own scriptures. In Psalm 146, the author says it so plainly and simply, yet so strongly and clearly: *[T]he Lord gives sight to the blind — Psalm 146:8a*. Despite the fact that there were no incidents of being healed of blindness in the Old Testament, those Scriptures accurately predicted that particular calling card of the promised Messiah — that giving sight to the blind would be something that he would absolutely be doing. And Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled every one of those centuries-old promises. I can almost hear the excitement of Isaiah celebrating in heaven as Jesus performed these miracles on earth: *Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, “Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, He will come with vengeance; with divine retribution He will come to save you.” Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy — Isaiah 35:3-6a*.

And the promise went so far beyond that as well. Not only was the healing of physical blindness promised but spiritual blindness as well. And Isaiah is still celebrating with the words of God Himself He was so blessed to share: *“I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them” — God speaking, Isaiah 42:16*. Wow!

That is the same God we worship today, praising the name of the Son who so gloriously represented the Father with His love, His words and His works. And He is still the One and Only to whom we are to bring all people, that they could by coming to Christ be changed by Christ into a life that reflects Christ. Do we believe that? Do we believe that God is still just as powerful, just as capable of changing old into new, of changing sick into well, of changing dirty into clean, of changing blindness to spiritual 20/20? That’s what we offered to know. That’s what we’re offered to share. That’s what we’re offered to proclaim. What a great place to be. Let’s pray!