

The Mission of the Messiah

Mark 8:22 – 38

Proposition: The mission of Jesus is to heal, suffer death, and rise from the dead to atone for our sin so God can act in grace toward undeserving sinners.

Application: Deny self. Die to sin. Follow Jesus.

In his book *“The Servant Who Rules,”* Ray Steadman tells the story about jazz musician George Shearing who was blind. He composed more than three hundred songs, including the jazz standard *“Lullaby of Birdland.”* Shearing toured throughout his career. He would often be found in busy downtown districts, walking along crowded sidewalks with his dark glasses and white cane. One day, he was at a busy junction, waiting for help to cross the street. Someone tapped him on the shoulder. What Shearing heard next was not an offer for help but a request. A stranger said to Shearing, *“Excuse me, sir, would you mind helping a blind man cross the street?”* Shearing was about to tell the other man that he too was blind. Then he thought, *Why not give it a go?* So he said, *“indeed, my friend. Here, take my arm.”* The two men set off arm in arm and crossed the street, the blind leading the blind. As they crossed, they heard many scary sounds --tires squealing, horns blaring, angry voices of cab drivers --but they made it safely to the other side. Later Shearing recalled the event and said, *“I’ll never do it again, but I’m glad I did it once. It was the biggest thrill of my life!”* Our text begins with the account of a blind man. He too was about to go through the greatest thrill of his life. He was about to experience one of the strangest miracles in the New Testament.

The mission of Jesus is to heal, to suffer death, and rise from the dead to atone for our sin so that God might act in grace toward undeserving sinners.

I. The Cure (8:22 – 26)

People take the blind man to Jesus (8:22): Unlike the miracle of feeding the 5000, a miracle that appears in all four Gospels, this miracle is found only in Mark. It is the only miracle performed in two stages. Healing a blind man is one of the signs that the Messiah has come (Matt 11:2 – 6). Notice the blind man does not come to Jesus on his own, others bring him. People need us to bring them to the Lord. We know how to find Jesus and so we can lead others to Him.

Jesus takes the blind man away from the crowd (8:23, 24): After this blind man was brought to the Lord, Jesus took him out of the village away from the crowd. Why? There are at least two reasons. *i. Bethsaida was under judgement* (Matt 11:20 – 22). Jesus did not want the town to incur greater judgement because of this miracle. *ii. Jesus wanted to minister to the man in private.*

Medicines and Miracles: They say wounds in our mouths heal faster than in any other part of our body. This is because saliva has a special protein that speeds up wound healing. This is where we get the saying “*licking our wounds.*” Saliva contains antimicrobial agents, enzymes, antibodies, growth factors and even an analgesic! Jesus did not spit on the blind man’s eyelids, He spit in his eyes. He used His saliva as a medical aid to His healing powers (John 9:6, 7). The Lord often uses the medicine available to us and adds His healing power to restore us back to health. We must not rely on medicines alone but on God’s power working through medicine. If the medicine is not safe nor effective, then we rely on the Lord alone.

Healing this then that (25, 26): If you are over 30, you will recall the film camera. To take a good picture we need film and a lens. If the film is damaged there is no image. If the lens is faulty the image is blurry. The eye has a film called a retina, and a lens. When Jesus healed the blind man, he could see the disciples walking around like trees. This suggests the man could see at one time but lost his vision. What he saw was blurry. The Lord healed his retina, but his lens was still damaged. Jesus then healed the lens and the man could see with 20/20 vision.

Why did Jesus heal in two stages? One reason may be that Jesus was adapting the pace of His power to the slowness of the man’s faith. There was a point in my life when I was getting about two hours of sleep a night. This went on for some time. I was so distressed I started taking sleeping pills. Knowing this was not a good long-term practice, I began to pray that the Lord would grant me at least 4 hours of sleep. I had enough faith to believe He could bless me with four hours of sleep. And He did! After a few weeks of sleeping for four hours my faith increased. Now I had enough faith to believe the Lord could bless me with five hours of sleep. And so I asked Him to bless me with 5 hours of sleep. He answered. This further increased my faith. Over time in step wise fashion the Lord healed my insomnia. My faith had to grow in order to receive the full healing. God may heal us in stages to help grow our faith. A second reason Jesus healed in two stages was to show that spiritual insight comes about step by step.

God ministers to us one-on-one. He uses medicine and adds His power to effect full healing. He may heal in a step wise fashion to grow our faith. At this point in Mark’s Gospel, we are about six months before the cross. Jesus journeyed 40 km northward to spend time with His men and prepare them for His death. On the way Jesus asked His disciples a vital question.

II. The Confession (8:27 – 30)

Public opinion about Jesus (8:27, 28): What did people believe about Jesus? Some believed He was John the Baptist raised from the dead. Others believed He was Elijah. Still others believed He was a prophet like Isaiah or Jeremiah. All agreed that Jesus was a prophet, but only a few believed He was the Messiah. When people talk about Jesus today, what do they say about Him? Here are two religious views about Jesus. Let’s begin with Islam. The Quran teaches that Jesus is only a prophet who “*foretold*” the coming of the greater prophet Mohammed. They believe

Jesus will return to earth as a Muslim. Judaism teaches that Jesus is a false messiah because He did not fulfill the messianic prophecies of the millennial age. What about you? What do you believe about Jesus? Are you influenced by the opinion of others? We are not allowed to create a Jesus we are comfortable with. He will not change His identity to suit our fancy. Culture is full of many Jesus identities. There is the Socialist Jesus; the New Age Jesus; the blue eyed long haired hippy Jesus; the gay Jesus; the woke Jesus; the social justice warrior Jesus. We must accept Jesus as He is and not re-make Him to suit our liking.

Peter's Belief About Jesus (8:29, 30): Peter had the right answer. “*You are the Messiah.*” His full confession is found in Matthew 16:16. Mark gave us the short version. Peter's grasp of the Messiah was still lacking. When Peter said “*You are the Messiah*” he meant that Jesus was the anointed One who will sit on David's throne and subdue the nations under His feet (Jer 23:5). Here is what was missing in Peter's statement about Jesus. Here is the part Jesus wanted His disciples to grasp. Jesus is the Messiah who will suffer death for our sin and be raised for our justification. The disciples could not accept a suffering Messiah. Yet the Messiah must be rejected before He can reign. His messianic mission could not be rightly understood apart from His death and resurrection.

Verse 31 is the turning point in the Gospel of Mark.

III. The Cross (8:31 – 38)

His Suffering is a necessity (8:31): Until now we see Jesus as the Servant of God. From now on we see Jesus as One who suffers for God. To help the disciples better grasp His Messianic mission Jesus highlights His present rejection not His future reign. His mission is not only to preach the Gospel; His mission is not only to heal the sick; His mission is to die for sin, so that the judgement seat of God could become the mercy seat of God.

One moment Peter was inspired from heaven the next moment he is inspired from hell. In Peter's mind the Messiah is to be crowned King not crucified as a criminal. Peter was horrified at Jesus' statement, so he took Jesus aside to correct His thinking.

Satan's plan is to keep Jesus from the cross (8:32, 33): Satan's plan was to keep Jesus from atoning for our sin. The deal Satan always offers is to focus our minds with the concerns of man at the exclusion of God's concerns. When we prefer our own interests over and above God's interests we are giving the devil a foothold in our lives. A. B. Bruce said it well, “*the whole aim of satanic policy is to get self-interest recognized as the chief aim of man.*” Christianity devoid of suffering is a devilish Christianity. It is a Christianity of self-interest. God's method to achieve His will involves suffering. If we chose to follow Jesus we must accept the terms of discipleship.

Steps to Discipleship (8:34 – 38): Discipleship involves living in the power of His resurrection and in the experience of His suffering (Phil 3:10). Let's talk about the suffering side of discipleship.

Deny self (8:34b): This does not mean giving up video games, or social media or your preferred Netflix series for a few weeks. Deny self means *giving up the right to rule your life*. It means giving up the right to run your life as you see fit. Deny self means to put God's will above your own.

Die to self (8:34c): The cross is not enduring some major burden. It is not persevering through a type of irritation. We should not apply our 21st century point of view to interpret a first century concept. The cross is about one thing, death. A condemned person was compelled to carry the horizontal beam of the cross (John 19:17). Taking up the cross is about dying to self; it is about dying to sin; it is about dying to the world (Gal 2:20).

Follow the Saviour (8:34d): We are called to take the same road Jesus took *even if it makes no sense*. We do not have the right to pick and choose what path we wish to follow.

The verbs *deny, take up and follow* – are all present tense verbs. We have to make these choices on a daily basis. Moment by moment we choose to deny self. Moment by moment we choose to die to sin. Moment by moment we choose to follow the Lord. We can never say we have arrived at a state of constant self denial, constant death to sin or constant obedience to the Lord. Discipleship is never a completed act, it is a continual process. It is a choice we make over and over again. A true disciple will never stop making such choices, no matter how hard they may be.

The reverse of *denying self* is self-preservation – to save our life. The opposite of *dying to sin* is to gain the world – gaining those things that are opposed to God. The opposite of *following the Lord* is to be ashamed of Him. As Christians the only safe road in this life is to identify with Jesus in His life, in His death and in His resurrection.