Mark Lesson 26 (2023)

**PETER’S CONFESSION OF THE MESSIAH**

Mark 8:22-30

Key Verse: 8:29

“‘But what about you?’ he asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’ Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah.’”

 It has been a while since we studied the Gospel of Mark last November, right before Thanksgiving. Now, I am glad to resume our Mark’s Gospel study. Since we lost track of Mark’s Gospel, we will have to review the previous passages. Jesus had been away from Galilee with his disciples and gone to the non-Jewish territory, including the province of Tyre, Sidon, and Decapolis. While ministering to various people in those areas, which took at least several months, Jesus’ primary focus was on his disciples. Traveling with them on foot for such a long distance included sufficient personal interactions, such as walking, talking, listening, laughing, eating, and sleeping. They had plenty of time together. The disciples had seen and experienced Jesus fully on a very personal level. They had witnessed Jesus healing sick people, including the most incurables, and feeding thousands of people simply by multiplying small loaves of bread. They even saw Jesus walking on water and thought they saw a ghost. What tremendous blessings and beautiful opportunities they had with Jesus.

However, the level of his disciples’ faith in him and their spiritual understanding was no better than that of the crowd. Due to their worries and anxieties, they failed to recognize the spirituality of God’s living presence through their master Jesus. So, Jesus rebuked them by saying in 8:17 and 18, “Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: ‘Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see and ears but fail to hear? And don’t you remember?”

The healing of the blind man’s eyes in today’s passage is recorded only in Mark’s Gospel. His eyesight was restored not immediately but gradually. It seems that the blind man represents Jesus’ disciples, who could not see and understand what Jesus said and who he was. Thankfully, Simon Peter could confess Jesus as the Messiah for the first time in history. Yet, we cannot say that his spiritual understanding was complete then. Why not? Because it’s just the beginning. His idea of the Messiah needed to be corrected repeatedly. Most of us confessed Jesus as the Messiah at some point. If Jesus asks us, *“Who do you say I am?”* most of us would answer, **“You are the Messiah!”** It’s important to confess Jesus as the Messiah. Yet, it’s also important to know what kind of Messiah Jesus is, which we will study next week. Our view of Messiah needs to be progressively updated so that we may have the full extent of our faith in him. This morning, let’s see how Jesus restored the blind man’s eyesight and how our spiritual eyesight can be opened.

 Look at verses 22-23. “They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. 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?’” Bethsaida was located on the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus was probably passing through. Yet, some people noticed his presence in the town and didn’t miss the chance to bring their friend who became blind for an unknown cause. They pleaded with Jesus to touch the man so his blindness might be cured. They must have trusted in Jesus’ love and healing power.

 Jesus didn’t hesitate to take the blind man by the hand (Pic#1). Jesus led him outside the village, probably to avoid public attention. Jesus didn’t want his miraculous healing to lead the crowd to the type of false adoration. Also, the fact that Jesus took the man by the hand and led him outside the village shows his intention to build a personal relationship with the blind man. It must have been quite a long distance when Jesus took the man by the hand until they reached where no one was around.

 Now, how did Jesus heal the man? He had spit on the man’s eyes and put his hands on him. Jesus used his saliva! It was not the first time that Jesus used his saliva for healing. When Jesus healed the deaf and mute man in the region of Decapolis (7:31-36), Jesus also spat and touched the man’s tongue. In John 9, Jesus mixed the mud with the saliva and told him to wash in the Siloam pool (9:6-7). He was healed completely. Undoubtedly, the use of saliva was a well-known Jewish remedy for healing.

 So, was the blind man healed? Not really. In most cases, when Jesus touched anybody, the healing occurred immediately. But not this time. When Jesus asked the man, “Do you see anything?” the man looked up and said, “I see people; they look like trees walking around.” This man was not born blind. Otherwise, he would not have known what trees looked like (Pic#2). His eyesight was partially restored. It was foggy and inaccurate. With that poor eyesight, driving or even walking around is dangerous.

 Look at verse 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." This man’s eyesight was completely restored, and he began to have a 20/20 vision. He must have shouted with great excitement, *“I can see everything now. Thank you, Jesus!”* We wonder why Jesus healed the man’s blindness gradually, not instantly. If he intended to cure immediately, he could. Maybe Jesus first healed the man’s optic nerve, but, like newborn babies, the man had to learn to focus on objects. So, Jesus touched the man’s eyes a second time, allowing him to see clearly.

Another possibility is that Jesus wanted to illustrate to the disciples that spiritual understanding comes progressively one step at a time. The disciples might have identified themselves with this man. They had seen many amazing things that Jesus had done. Yet, their spiritual vision had become dull and foggy due to their fear and anxiety. If they tried to lead people to Christ with such poor spiritual vision, it would be like a blind man leading another blind man (Pic#3).

Likewise, as disciples of Jesus, we need a touch of Jesus so that our spiritual eyesight can improve until we see him clearly face to face. It reminds us of what Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13:12, “For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.” Our spiritual eyesight might become blurry when we are bombarded with worries and many challenges. But when Jesus touches our eyes, our spiritual vision and faith can be renewed and even improved. So, we should humbly ask Jesus to heal our spiritual eyesight. “Open the eyes of my heart, Lord! I want to see you. I want to see your kingdom.” Jesus will not ignore our plea but will surely restore our spiritual vision.

Look at verse 26. “Jesus sent him home, saying, ‘Don’t even go into the village.’” This man can now go home without needing people to take him there. Jesus’ command not to go into the village indicates his intent to remain private, uninterrupted by the public, so that he could focus on educating his disciples. Now, it’s time to open his disciples’ spiritual eyesight.

Look at verses 27-28. “Jesus and his disciples went on to the village around Caesarea Philippi. On the way, he asked them, ‘Who do people say I am?’ They replied, ‘Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.’” Caesarea Philippi was located at the Jordan River source near the beautiful Mount Hermon slope, 25 miles directly north of Bethsaida. (Map#1) The area was known to be the land of beauty and fertility. (Pic#4 & Pic#4b) Walking along the road, surrounded by beautiful mountains and hills, Jesus and his disciples could have relaxed, enjoying their company and time together. Then, Jesus asked them about people’s view of him by saying, “Who do people say I am?”

Why do you think Jesus asked that kind of question? He didn’t ask this question because he didn’t know people’s ideas about him. In fact, through the powerful mission trip of Jesus’ disciples in Chapter 6, some people thought that John the Baptist had been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers were at work in him. Others said that Jesus was Elijah, and others claimed he was a prophet (6:14-15). Jesus was fully aware of what people thought of him. So, Jesus didn’t need to ask this question, except that it was the question to prepare his disciples for the more personal question, “Who do you say I am?”

John the Baptist was a mighty prophet in Jesus’ time. He preached that people should repent before God’s judgment came upon them. He baptized many people by the Jordan River. His baptism was the baptism of repentance. Some thought that he might even be the Messiah. Herod the Tetrarch believed Jesus was John the Baptist, whom he beheaded. Elijah was also a mighty prophet and miracle worker who raised the widow’s son from death and defeated the prophets of Baal by bringing fire down from heaven. Unlike all other prophets, including John the Baptist, who was beheaded, Elijah didn’t experience physical death. Instead, the chariots of fire raptured him to heaven (Pic#5).

Wow! Probably, for some time, the disciples might have thought people’s general view of Jesus, either as John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets, could be considered a badge of honor, being included in the hall of fame among the most powerful prophets in Israel’s history. Yet, Jesus was not satisfied with it. Why not? It’s not because it was not just good enough. It was utterly wrong. However, I don’t think people got it wrong intentionally. They could not see who Jesus really was because they were spiritually blind. They needed a divine touch, like the blind man in the previous event. We need a personal touch of Jesus to know who he truly is.

Look at verse 29. “‘What about you?’ he asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’ Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah.’” Simon Peter acknowledged Jesus by saying, “You are the Messiah!” And his answer was correct. Probably, he didn’t hesitate. According to John’s Gospel, most disciples followed Jesus, believing that Jesus was the Messiah, like John and Andrew, who used to be the disciples of John the Baptist, Simon (Andrew’s brothers), Philipp, and Nathanael. (Jn. 1:35-51)

So, how could they recognize Jesus as the Messiah? Was it because they were great Bible scholars or theologians? No. Were they more intelligent than others? How were they able to recognize Jesus as the Messiah? It was the work of God in them through the Holy Spirit. Mark did not record it. But In Matthew’s gospel, Jesus said to Simon, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.” According to Apostle Paul, no one can acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah except by the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12:3 states, “Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘Jesus be cursed,’ and no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.’”

How does the Holy Spirit work in us? The Holy Spirit works in various ways, through life events or other people’s testimony. Primarily, the Spirit of God works in us as we hear God’s words. Simon Peter said to Jesus in John 6:68-69, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God” I accepted Jesus as the Lord and Savior for the first time in my life one summer night in 1975. At that time, I insisted that God had nothing to do with my life. But I was weary and burdened. One evening as I spoke with an assistant pastor in the church, he told me that if I opened the window of my heart, Jesus would come into my life like the wind. And I did. That evening, I felt embraced by Jesus’ love and decided to follow Jesus. Then, a few years later, in 1977, I was doing my military service in the Korean Air Force.

I was invited to attend Annam UBF Summer Bible Conference. While listening to the message based on John chapter 11, I felt deeply touched by Jesus’ words, “*Lazarus, come out!”* During the last nearly 50 years of my life as a Christian, my spiritual eyesight has become dull. But the Lord has touched my heart with his words. Without the touch of Jesus, I would have remained confused and become spiritually lethargic. We all need a personal touch of Jesus.

Simon Peter was the first person who made confessed Messiah in history. The basic meaning of the word **“Messiah”** is **“the one anointed by God.”** In the Old Testament, kings, priests, and prophets were anointed with oil. In Mark’s gospel, Jesus rarely used the term *“Messiah”* or *“Christ”* for himself. Probably, he avoided it because of its wrong political implications and widespread understanding. Yet he never denied the title when others applied it to him.

So, what did Peter mean when he acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah at this point? Well, he indeed believed that Jesus was God’s anointed one. Yet, he still thought that the Messiah should save Israel from their enemies with his almighty power, including the Roman Empire, and establish Israel as the world's ruling power. Then is Jesus the Messiah Peter thought he was? No. Indeed, Jesus is God who became a man to be the Messiah of the world. Yet, he didn’t come to save Israel from Rome. Instead, he came to bring God’s kingdom to all people through his death and resurrection. He proclaimed, “The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news.” (1:15). Simon Peter confessed Jesus as the Messiah. Yet, his view of the Messiah was inaccurate and needed to be corrected constantly.

 So, we see that in verse 30, Jesus warned his disciples not to tell anyone about him. Why not? They were still spiritually blind due to their strong human desires and ideas. The underlying question they must consider is not whether Jesus is the Messiah but what kind of Messiah Jesus is. And what does it mean to follow him? We will continue to think about those things in the following passages.

Let me close my sermon today. After many years of my life as Jesus’ disciple, I am confessing Jesus as the Messiah means acknowledging him as God himself. It’s better to say that if we want to know God, we must see Jesus.

Jesus said to Philipp, who asked Jesus to show God, “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?” (Jn. 14:9) Hebrew 1:3a states, “The Son (Christ Jesus) is the radiation of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being.” What does it mean? It means Jesus is God himself, no less and no more of God. Jesus is the best and perfect revelation of who God is. Even though people may have distorted views of God for many reasons, Jesus can straighten them all. Jesus is perfect theology. Through the fullness of his life on earth, Jesus has shown us the very face and heart of God. Jesus is God who is all in all. We may have many views about God. It seems to be better to say, *“A More Christlike God.”* (*Bradley Jersak*) He is the good news for all people, including you and me. When we speak to Jesus, *“Lord, you are the Messiah,”* we acknowledge that he is God. He is everything. He is the Alpha and the Omega. May the Lord open our eyes to see who Jesus really is! May the Lord lead us until we see him face to face.