

# SAVIORBLIND

mark 8

So there I was, at LensCrafters a couple of years ago. I hadn't had an eye-checkup in a while and I could tell my prescription probably needed to be adjusted. So they were doing all their regular tests and measurements and all that. And then the doctor broke out the color-blindness test. Always a favorite of mine because I am, in fact, colorblind. Actually, once a year or so I take a color-blindness test online just to see if I've gotten any better, which I haven't. But it's still fun to try.

So the doctor goes through the test, and I remember her sort of pausing and getting a little quieter and saying, *"Do you know that you're colorblind?"* Which, of course, I did and that was of great relief to my doctor. I was diagnosed back when I was about 16. Prior to that, I couldn't figure out why people always seemed critical of my wardrobe choices, but now it makes a little more sense to me.

Vision tests are important to us because *vision* is important. While some eye problems we can't correct, lots of things we can. And, if you have one of the typical eyesight problems, rather than stumble through life unable to differentiate between a bush and a person, you're able to go and get glasses or receive treatment so that you can see clearly.

The Bible talks a lot about our spiritual vision as Christians and it warns us that there are things that can cloud or distort our vision. This morning we get a chance to open up God's word and allow Him to inspect our eyesight, as it were. It's a chance for God to sit us down and explain how we see more clearly His power and His plan for our lives.

And that's what we want. Because, my guess is that many of us spend a great deal of time feeling confused and unsure and wanting for clarity in life, especially when we're going through a difficult struggle or facing some sort of opposition in life. We don't always feel like we're really getting the full picture in life. Perhaps we feel a disconnect, spiritually speaking.

But, when those things are happening, it's important to remember that God is on record as being the God of wisdom and the God of revelation. He's made Himself available to us so that we *can* have peace and clarity and confidence in His will and His commands. And perhaps, if we're not feeling those things right now, there are some adjustments that the Lord wants to make in our lives so that our relationship with Him is where He wants it to be and our vision is unhindered.

The text we're going to look at is Mark chapter 8. We'll take the whole chapter. On Wednesday mornings at our men's study we've been going through the Gospel of Mark a chapter at a time. And for me it's been a very interesting way of studying the Bible. Of course, there are all sorts of ways to read and study the Scriptures. You can read a chapter at a time, you can read a verse at a time, you can read a whole book at a time. And, even though everybody has a specific pace they like to keep in their devotions, one way isn't better than another. It's God's word. And the Lord can speak to us something powerful in one phrase that we think about all day, but He also speaks to us if we read the entire letter to the Corinthians in one sitting like the

Corinthians did when they originally received it. What's been great is to take these chapters of Mark and look for overarching themes as you group the smaller passages together. And even though there's a lot of movement and variety in Mark, it's a fast-paced narrative, I've been excited to see some things I hadn't really seen before by looking for chapter themes. So, if you have a Bible, follow along as I read our text aloud.

**Mark 8.1-38 - In those days, the multitude being very great and having nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples to Him and said to them, "I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And if I send them away hungry to their own houses, they will faint on the way; for some of them have come from afar."**

**Then His disciples answered Him, "How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?"**

**He asked them, "How many loaves do you have?"**

**And they said, "Seven."**

**So He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And He took the seven loaves and gave thanks, broke them and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and they set them before the multitude. They also had a few small fish; and having blessed them, He said to set them also before them. So they ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets of leftover fragments. Now those who had eaten were about four thousand. And He sent them away, immediately got into the boat with His disciples, and came to the region of Dalmanutha.**

**Then the Pharisees came out and began to dispute with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, testing Him. But He sighed deeply in His spirit, and said, "Why does this generation seek a sign? Assuredly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation." And He left them, and getting into the boat again, departed to the other side.**

**Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, and they did not have more than one loaf with them in the boat. Then He charged them, saying, "Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod."**

**And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "It is because we have no bread."**

**But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, "Why do you reason because you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened? Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments did you take up?"**

**They said to Him, "Twelve."**

**"Also, when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of fragments did you take up?"**

**And they said, "Seven."**

**So He said to them, "How is it you do not understand?"**

**Then He came to Bethsaida; and they brought a blind man to Him, and begged Him to touch him. So He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the town. And when He had spit on his eyes and put His hands on him, He asked him if he saw anything.**

**And he looked up and said, "I see men like trees, walking."**

**Then He put His hands on his eyes again and made him look up. And he was restored and saw everyone clearly. Then He sent him away to his house, saying, “Neither go into the town, nor tell anyone in the town.”**

**Now Jesus and His disciples went out to the towns of Caesarea Philippi; and on the road He asked His disciples, saying to them, “Who do men say that I am?”**

**So they answered, “John the Baptist; but some say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.”**

**He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”**

**Peter answered and said to Him, “You are the Christ.”**

**Then He strictly warned them that they should tell no one about Him.**

**And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He spoke this word openly. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, “Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.”**

**When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”**

There’s a lot going on in that text. A couple miracles, a fun meet and greet with the Pharisees. But, really, the main bulk of the chapter is Jesus interacting with His disciples, and, specifically there are several instances where they just weren’t getting it. It’s what they always get criticized for. Of course, we wouldn’t have done any better, but there on display is the fact that there was a remarkable disconnect between what Jesus was saying and doing in their midst and what they were realizing and understanding. Twice Jesus says to them, “How is it that you don’t understand?” He wanted to bring them along.

At the beginning of the chapter there’s the feeding of the 4,000, which the disciples are kind of checked out on and a little tight-fisted. Then you see them on a boat ride together and Jesus is trying to teach them and warn them about what He called the leaven of the Pharisees, but the disciples get into an argument over who was supposed to bring bread on the trip. Then, at the end, you have that rough interaction between Peter and Jesus where Peter rebukes Jesus so then Jesus has to rebuke Peter and then He sits His guys down and says, “Ok, you guys are missing it and you need to get your heads in the game.” So, it’s a rough chapter for the disciples.

But, tucked away in the middle of all that, there is this little story of Jesus healing a blind man. And it’s a very unusual healing. It was a 2-stage process, as Jesus spits on the guy (*thanks Jesus*), puts His hands on his eyes, and that restores *part* of the vision, so then Jesus places His hands on the man again, bringing full sight to his eyes.

And I think it's remarkable to see such an unusual healing in the middle of a chapter filled with situations where the Lord's disciples were not really understanding what the Lord was saying to them or what He was doing in their lives or the work that He was accomplishing all around them. Jesus said, "You have eyes, but you're not seeing." And then there's a story of a blind man being healed. But, remember, Jesus could've healed this man with a word. With one thought. Sometimes people were healed by just touching a piece of His clothes. So, why all of a sudden is this 2-stage, blindness-to-sight miracle nestled between all these interactions between Jesus and His disciples?

I believe if we take the chapter as a whole we see God teaching His people about how to make sure we're seeing clearly with spiritual eyes. How do we see who God is and what He's done and what He's saying to us? How can we avoid feeling like we're in the dark and feeling like we don't know which direction to go?

And certainly we may *feel* that way at times. But one of the great themes you get from this chapter is that Jesus really wanted His disciples to get it. He really wanted them to understand and to lock in and to take hold of all that He was revealing to them. God wants to bring guidance and peace to your life. He's not trying to withhold those things from you.

**Psalms 29.11 - The Lord will give strength to His people, the Lord will bless His people with peace.**

God is in the business of filling us and giving us vision, not abandoning us or leaving us to be overwhelmed by life. And we need to believe that.

So, if we put ourselves in the place of the disciples, we can see where they missed the mark and we can see what Jesus said to them and how we avoid the disconnect that they were experiencing during this chapter.

And seeing this text as a whole, from a birds-eye view, we discover that the big problem with their spiritual vision was that they were self-centered. That's why, when all was said and done, Jesus sat them down and said, "We need to deal with what's going on here. What you need to do is deny self. If you want to come after Me and follow Me and take hold of the incredible life I've made available to you, then the self-centeredness has to stop." He said, "You are looking at life from a human point of view, not from God's point of view." And the human point of view is always selfish and self-serving.

Now, self-centeredness is a scary thing because it's hard-wired into each and every one of our hearts. And the Bible says it hardens us to the tender voice of the Lord. That's what Jesus pointed out in verse 17. James says where self-seeking exists, confusion and every evil thing are there. So, as Christians, if we don't get a hold of our self-centeredness, we're in for trouble. Because the Lord said that if we don't lay down our selves and take up His cross, we're not following Jesus Christ. The last 5 verses in that chapter are heavy duty. And God wasn't speaking them just to unbelievers, but to His disciples as well. He's speaking to all of us.

So let's take a quick look at how we deal with this issue, using the disciples as an example and this text as a guide.

First, the feeding of the 4,000. An incredible and famous miracle.

I think this episode is kind of amazing because this exact same scenario had played out for them just 2 chapters earlier in the Gospel of Mark. The only difference was that the *first* time they had less food to start with and a *BIGGER* crowd to feed. The famous feeding of 5,000 with 5 loaves and 2 fish. Now they had 4,000 with 7 loaves and a few fish. But still, the disciples felt powerless in the situation. They didn't have confidence that the Lord would do something.

#### **Mark 8.4 - "...How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?"**

And the contrast that we're given in the text is that Jesus Christ had *compassion* on the multitude, yet the disciples wanted to send them away. They saw the situation and sort of threw up their hands and said, "Well, what are you going to do? We've got 7 fish, but *WE* need those for ourselves. Send these people home." I'm sure they were exhausted and felt overwhelmed by the multitude of people who were there, but in that moment, they gave in to self-centeredness and in this case it did two things.

First, it made them forget not only what God is capable of, but what God had already done in their own lives! These guys had *SEEN* Jesus feed a multitude even greater than this. And what happens in our own lives is that we fixate on our circumstances or some big obstacle facing us and we forget that our God is a God of provision. And we spend all our energy thinking about the size of the giant in front of us rather than the what God might want to do. And when we do that, we make mistakes. We start moving away from God in our hearts and looking for our own supply or escape. Look at Abraham. The Lord tells him to go to the land of Canaan and dwell there. He tells Abraham that He's going to make a great nation from his family. He believes God and goes. But then a famine comes. So he jumps ship. Heads to Egypt. Gets involved in some serious sin. Lying about his wife. Selling her off to be a concubine for Pharaoh. This is what happens when we forget that God is a God of provision. So as we apply this to ourselves, the question is whether we're relying on God for any supply in our lives, or if we've figured out a way we can exist without having to exercise faith or dependence on God's provision in any way.

But second, this feeding of the 4,000 illustrates that self-centeredness causes us to be discompassionate. For whatever reason, the disciples weren't very interested in serving this multitude. The needs of the crowd were less important to them. Perhaps they were afraid to give the Lord their 7 loaves. Perhaps they were tired of picking up fragments to eat. But whatever it is, they had allowed themselves to become callused to others. And, at this moment, they weren't excited about being used by God to minister to people. Looking within this morning, we each should evaluate our own compassion. Are we ever moved to serve someone or reach out to someone or intercede for someone? Whether in a big way or just a small, simple way. Because if we're never moved with compassion, there's a good chance we're spending our time focused on self, rather than seeing the many opportunities God has brought to us for ministry and service. That's what happened to the disciples and it can happen to us if we fail to deny self. Because God is in the business of getting us to a place where the people around us need ministry. And we are to be the agents of His ministry, not constantly keeping a distance between ourselves and everyone else.

Another issue that came up for the guys was later when they were in the boat with Jesus. Jesus was taking the everyday situation they were in and using it to teach them something spiritual. But the disciples were all wrapped up in the physical and temporal. It wasn't an

official teaching session, so they assumed the Lord was referring to the fact that they hadn't brought any bread with them.

And when we're self-centered, when we're viewing life from the human perspective rather than by the Spirit of God and through the word of God, we're going to miss opportunities that God uses to teach us something. So many of the mundane situations of life are what God intends to be a classroom for us. Because the Lord doesn't just want to talk to us on Sunday morning, but His desire is to continually teach us things. His desire is to daily interact with us. Using small things and big things, casual things and formal things to reveal Himself to us and show us what His will is. But if we're always wrapped up in ourselves and earthly, material things, then our hearts are going to be hardened to the voice of God, who *daily* attempts to impart to us eternal truths.

Charles Spurgeon once said:

*"To a man who seeks first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, his house is a temple, his meals are sacraments, his garments are vestments, every day is a holy day, and he himself is a priest and a king unto God."*

Our lives are not just the chores we do and the errands we run and the things we buy. Instead the daily life of the Christian is the eternal opportunity to know God and accomplish His will in the field where He has placed us. To learn eternal truths and see above the problems of life, having a heavenly mindset. And if we find ourselves continually frustrated or constantly complaining, then perhaps we're missing the tender teaching of God in everyday circumstances.

But, then we have this third interaction with the disciples. That famous episode with Peter. In one moment, Peter is declaring that Jesus is the Messiah, and in the next he's pulling Jesus aside and telling Him to pipe down.

And it's interesting that this all happens as the Lord is trying to teach the guys something. He's trying to reveal to them what His mission is all about and what was going to happen in the future. But the message that He was giving wasn't very palatable to Peter. Peter didn't want to hear that kind of message. He had his *own* ideas about what the Christ was and what the Christ would do. The kind of Messiah that Jesus was describing wasn't the kind Peter was looking for at that moment. He was happy to be a disciple of the Messiah, as long as the message and the situation fit the agenda and opinions that Peter already had.

Jesus has to stop him and say, "Pete, you're looking at life through selfish, human eyes. You're not looking at life as God has revealed it to you."

And we have to understand that being a Christian doesn't mean that God signs off on whatever we decide we want to believe or do. Being a disciple means following the Lord down the road that He's set us on. And, while each of us has a specific path to walk with God, all of us are called in the same direction in the Scriptures: The death of self, the service of others, the work of the Gospel and submission to Christ. That's what life is all about. That's how we take hold of the abundant life that Jesus came to give us. That's how we rise above the struggles of this world. By having our vision adjusted. By seeing life through the revelation of God. Through the word of God. Not being angry when God tells us something that is uncomfortable or

challenging to us. Not shaking our heads and slamming our Bibles shut because something we read seems to hinder our agenda. But coming to the Lord and saying, "I desire You and I desire to follow You, wherever You go. I want to gain everything You've offered, and I willingly accept Your complete rule over my life."

I think many times in life we get stuck in verse 24. And we need to look at this blind man's example because it makes so much sense in connection to the rest of the chapter. You have this blind man who meets with Jesus. Jesus takes him out of the town and they have this incredible interaction. Jesus touched the man and something started to happen. But his vision wasn't quite right. "I see men like trees walking" is what he said. He had partial vision. It was an incomplete transformation.

And, in a sense, that's where the disciples were at in this chapter. Because this is kind of how the self-centered Christian lives life. A self-centered, earthly focused Christian is someone who's had an incredible interaction with the Savior, but their vision is distorted.

Now, if after verse 24 the blind man would've held up his hands and said to Jesus, "Ok, I see men like trees walking. That's an INCREDIBLE improvement, so thank you," we would laugh at that. We'd be heartbroken. We would see that as a failure. We'd look at that and think, "Don't you realize that Christ could've restored you *all the way*? Given you clarity of vision and freedom from your blindness?" Because we understand that blurred vision isn't better than blindness. *SIGHT* is better than blindness!

But when it comes to our spiritual vision, our understanding of who God is and what He's doing in our lives, understanding what His word is saying to us, we have a tendency to get caught in verse 24. The Savior has taken us by the hand and touched our lives, but then, like we see the disciples doing in this text, we resist His coming in and laying His hands on us again to complete the work and the transformation that He started.

The Bible explains that when we're saved we begin an amazing process of what is known as sanctification. As the Lord works on our lives and transforms us bit by bit. As He makes us more like Himself and more fruitful and more abundant in His grace. This process of conformation continues all the way through life until we are united with Jesus in heaven, where we are fully, finally glorified. Knowing as we are known. Seeing God face to face. Perfect and free from the presence of sin. That's the process.

But, in the mean time, we have to allow God to again and again put His hands on our lives and transform us. We're free to allow or resist His healing touch. And when we lose focus on the fact that God is a God of power and provision and plan, then we get caught in verse 24. We choose not to take up our cross because we start getting self-centered. Self-oriented. We allow our own agendas to dictate our decisions. We become obsessed with wealth and comfort and control of our own lives. And, when that happens, we don't see life the way it is. We don't see people the way we should. We become discompassionate. We don't recognize opportunities God brings to us to do ministry and spread the Gospel. We aren't picking up on the truths God is setting in front of us day by day. We don't grab hold of what the Bible is teaching us. We see men like trees walking. And when we get stuck in that spot, we're really of very little use and we're not where God wants us to be.

Clarity and usefulness and understanding come to us when we're willing to let the Lord put His hands on us again and again. Not holding back certain areas of our lives, not thinking we're done being transformed, not demanding He do certain things before we submit to Him, but willingly saying, "I'm not ashamed or afraid of anything You want to do, because You've revealed Yourself to me, You've transformed my life, You've provided for me and I trust You." We have to participate in this sanctification. We have to allow God to daily put His hands on our lives and allow Him to shape us and adjust our vision. Because we know what God is capable of. We know what He called us to do. We simply must be willing to lay down self and follow after Him.

There's one other portion of this text we didn't look at. That's Jesus interacting with the Pharisees. They were not disciples. They didn't believe.

Maybe you're here and you're not a Christian. You don't believe Jesus is who He says He is. Maybe you want God to prove Himself to you first. That if He does this, this and this, *THEN* you'll believe.

The Pharisees demanded a sign like this. And the truth is that God has revealed Himself to you through creation and through His word. He's explained exactly who He is and what He's all about. He's explained that your life is just a vapor, it appears for a moment and then it's gone and after that comes judgment. The Bible details that if you die without believing on Jesus Christ as Savior, you are sending yourself to an eternity in hell, separated from God, with no hope of salvation.

Maybe you're too busy living life to think about Jesus. Maybe you're too busy building an empire for yourself. What will it profit you if you gain the whole world but lose your soul?

God loves you. He's explained how your life can be saved and then how your life can have meaning and filling and purpose. Don't demand a sign. God has given you many glimpses of Himself. But, at some point, Jesus is going to depart from you. His invitation is always open, but the moments of decision will eventually pass. And right now, if you're not a Christian, God is giving you a chance to make a decision about Him. Will you believe? Will you follow Him or will you reject His love for you and His sacrifice for your sins? You have to make that choice right now.

Listen, God wants us to get it. He wants us to understand. There's a big, incredible life waiting for us out there. Full of grace. Full of purpose. Full of opportunity. Full of guidance. And it's a life that the Lord can't wait to give us. He's not withholding these things from us.

But if we want it, we've got to get our heads in the game and get our hearts in the hands of Christ. We've got to stop focusing on ourselves and start focusing on Jesus.

Will we do it today? Will we come to the Lord and say, "God, I want what You want. I'm opening my life for You to do whatever You'd like." Are we willing to lay down our lives as a sacrifice? Or will we harden our hearts to Jesus?