

Seeing Jesus

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Preacher: Jack Strain

[0 : 0 0] Mark chapter 8 verses 11 to 30. That's on page 1011 of the Bibles in front of you. Mark chapter 8 verses 11 to 30. The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven. He sighed deeply and said, why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to it. Then he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side. The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat. Be careful, Jesus warned them. Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod. They discussed this with one another and said, it is because we have no bread.

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, when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up? Twelve, they replied. And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up? They answered, seven.

He said to them, do you still not understand? 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 spat 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.

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. Jesus sent him home, saying, don't even go into the village.

[2 : 0 6] Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages 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. But what about you, he asked, who do you say I am? Peter answered, you are the Messiah. Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

Thanks be to God. Amen. Great. Good morning, everyone. As Martin said, my name's Jack. I'm a member of the congregation here.

And as we start, I'm going to pray for God's help. Father God, we ask that you would speak to us now as we come to your word.

We ask that you would work by your spirit to give us understanding and to change us by what we hear from you this morning. Amen. I'd like us to start with a question to think about.

And that question is, what do we need from God now? And you might be thinking, oh, that's actually quite an easy question to answer. And we don't have to look very far, just look at the news at the moment. We see a world that is in need. Just in the past month, you'd say 3.7 million Ukrainians had to flee their country due to a brutal invasion by a Russian government that seems to be happy to shell their cities to the ground and to target civilians. And we need God to bring peace, to bring restoration, and to bring an end to violence. Or you could say, well, less than six months ago, we had a COP26 here in Glasgow. And we have the problem of climate change, causing drought, affecting food supply, water shortage, flooding, loss of ecosystems. We need God to do something about that. And if it's not enough problems in the world, well, we could say, well, just look at my own life, look at our own lives, and problems with us, and problems with the way that we think and behave and feel. And what we need from God is for God to change something about us as people. And I don't know what you'd say that you'd say that we need from God. If you had to pick one thing, the one thing to change so that everything else would fall into place.

[4 : 34] What we're going to be looking at this morning in Mark 8, as we're going to see, what does God have to say to us about what we need? And so far in Mark chapters 5 to 8, the section that we've been in, we started in chapter 6. But these chapters make the point that Jesus is God's rescuer.

He has fed the 5,000, he has walked on water, he's fed 4,000, kind of an extra feeding, showing that just like God rescued his people from Egypt back then in the past, so Jesus is here to rescue God's people, to rescue his people here and now.

And what we've seen is this is an amazing rescue. In Mark chapter 5, it's a rescue that Jesus can do even from death as he brings a girl back from the dead. Jesus is God's rescuer, here to rescue us from death, to take us to a perfect world, to be with him. But the big problem that we've seen so far is that no one gets it. Everybody seems to be getting it wrong. The crowd in Jesus' hometown, the people you'd think would be on his side, well, they don't get it. They are offended by Jesus, God's rescuer, and they want nothing to do with him. The ruling elites don't get it. We saw that King Herod rejected God's message of repentance as well. And even Jesus' own disciples, his closest followers, well, they seem confused by it all. So the question that we've been left asking is what is wrong with them? And why is no one getting it? And that's what we're going to see this morning.

So if you've shut your Bible, please open it up again on page 1011. And verse 11, the first thing I want us to see is that their problem is unbelief. Look at verse 11. The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus to test him. They asked him for a sign from heaven. And then you might think, well, that Jesus' reaction in verse 12 is an overreaction. He sighed deeply and said, why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly, I tell you, no sign will be given to it. What's wrong with them asking for a sign from Jesus? It's not unreasonable, you'd say, to ask for more evidence. But he's not overreacting.

And if you've been here for the rest of our series, you'll probably have a good idea why. Jesus has provided loads and loads of evidence about who he is. He has been doing incredible things to show that he is God's rescuer. And the Pharisees in particular have known about this for a very long time. They've been there right since the beginning. They were there when he healed a withered man's hand on the Sabbath. And they must have at least seen or at least heard about his feeding of the 5,000 and the 4,000. And there's plenty of evidence about who Jesus is. But still, they don't believe him. Their unbelief, it can't be negotiated with. And it is stubborn and unwilling to properly engage with the evidence. And so Jesus says, enough is enough. Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly, I tell you, no sign will be given to it. No more signs and no more evidence and no more chances for them. Nothing more to show to them about who he is and no more proof of his ability to rescue them. And they are left by themselves and there is no rescue for those who reject Jesus. And they're like a group of people who've got stuck in a room in a house fire and the smoke is starting to fill the room and it's getting hotter and hotter. And it's becoming more and more dangerous with every passing moment. And they can't leave the room. They're stuck. But fortunately, someone's called 999. There's a fire engine outside. And the fireman comes up to the window.

[8 : 38] Come with us. Come with me. We can get you down. Come down this ladder and you'll be safe. No, no, they say. We're waiting for the fire engine. But that's me. Look at my helmet, my uniform, my badge. Look outside the window and see the flashing blue lights and the big red truck.

No, don't you have something more. We just need a bit more convincing. Maybe a letter from your boss or something. A phone call. It's ridiculous. I know. What more could that fireman say?

No, it's irrational and stubborn. And like them, their problem is their unbelief. So Jesus turns his back on them and there is nothing more to show. And then the second thing I want us to see about the problem of their unbelief naturally following on, it is a disaster for them. And I think we get told this with a couple of really key words in verse 12. I mean, you might think that Jesus' word choice in verse 12 is a bit odd. Why does he use, for instance, the word generation?

And as Mark, as he narrates it, why does he use the word test? And there could be other words that he could have used, but why does he use the word generation and the word test? The words generation and test are used to describe what Israel did in response to God when he brought them out of Egypt in the Exodus. And there's some references on the sheet, if you'd like, some more convincing of those. We're not going to look at them now if you want to look them up later. And they are not good words. God rescued them from Egypt out of slavery with incredible miracles and demonstrations of power. He brought plagues, he parted the Red Sea, and he fed them with bread from heaven. But what did they do in response to that? After they saw all that God had done, they saw all the evidence, but they would never trust him. They would never obey him. They were described as a generation that tested God, that didn't believe him in spite of all they had seen. So what did God do in response to that?

He said that none of them would enter the promised land. They would all die without getting to the place that God had promised for them. Their unbelief killed them. That whole generation, it died in the wilderness. God judged them and found them to be guilty, and they never saw the promised land.

[11 : 13] And so like for a group of people stuck in a burning building, refusing to help to the firemen is not just stupid or irrational. It's what's going to get them killed. Jesus is God's rescuer, the Christ, and here to rescue us now. But we see it in the world today that people still will not believe it.

And it's worth just spending a bit of time what we mean by God's rescue, and what we mean by him being the Christ for us now. How is Jesus the Christ? Because he doesn't rescue us by giving us bread, like he rescued them back then, by physically feeding us. His rescue for us is on the cross.

His rescue for us is his death. In some ways, that's what the whole message of Mark's gospel is always about. It is always about the cross. It's always about Jesus being executed as a criminal to take God's anger at our sin so that we might be forgiven by God when we put our trust in him.

And that is God's rescue. And now, often when people here around us hear the message about the cross, they don't see God's saving power. They don't see God's rescuer. They don't recognize Jesus as their savior. And when people reject God's rescuer, just as they did back then, they condemn themselves like the Israelite generation who die in the wilderness. And people who reject God's rescue face God's judgment, and they face hell.

So the next thing I want us to see is that this is a problem that the disciples share as well. And we get them in their boat with Jesus in verse 14, well, verse 13, and he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side. And he's in the boat with the disciples, verse 14. And the disciples have forgotten to bring bread with them. Oh, well, they've got one loaf. I don't know how long it takes to cross the Sea of Galilee, a few hours maybe, but it seems like they're going to get pretty hungry. It's a pretty big deal that they've got nothing to eat. But in response to that, Jesus gives them quite a cryptic warning. Be careful, verse 15. Jesus warned them, watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod. And what does that mean? What exactly does he want them to watch out for? Well, Herod, he heard the message about God through John the Baptist, but he turned it down. He said no, blinded by power and lured by sex. He turned his back on it and had

[13 : 48] John the Baptist executed. The Pharisees, they are in love with their authority. They're in love with their position of power and their influence and are unable to admit their own problem. And so they won't recognize Jesus either. They turn him down and reject him and plot to try and kill him.

So what Jesus is saying to his disciples, he's saying, don't be like them. Don't be like the Pharisees. Don't be like Herod. But they just don't get it. It's almost as if they haven't been with Jesus at all. And they just go back to talking about how they have no bread. We have no bread, they say.

So Jesus puts his finger right on the problem. Verse 17. 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 it seems like all of the answers to those questions is yes. They do not see. They do not understand. Because if they understood who Jesus was, they wouldn't be worrying about not having any bread in the boat. Because they know that Jesus is able to feed 5,000 people with two loaves. 4,000 people from just a few loaves. They too lack spiritual sight. They are just like everyone else. And the key phrase, their hearts are hardened. Are your hearts hardened? And see, Jesus taught us about our hearts. He taught us about our hearts back in chapter 7.

And he taught us that people's hearts are evil. It's not things that come in from the outside into us that are our problem. It is our hearts that produce evil thoughts. Our sinful hearts that blind us from understanding who Jesus is. The evidence is not the problem. Evidence isn't a problem for the disciples. The problem is within us. And Jesus reminds them they have seen plenty of evidence.

[15 : 58] When I broke the five loaves for the 5,000, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up? 12, they replied. And when I broke the seven loaves for the 4,000, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up? They answered, seven. He said to them, do you still not understand? The facts are in front of them, but they have no idea what's going on. He's given them so many chances to see that. He reminds them of that. They were there. They saw the miracles. But it looks like they're going to reject the rescuer as well. It seems that they are really, on the inside, just like the Pharisees and just like Herod.

They see the evidence. They hear the message, but they are incapable of believing it. And they are rejecting Jesus as well. And this is our problem too. If it's their problem, it is our problem.

Well, what's the solution? It seems that left by themselves, they are completely and utterly stuck. Well, it's not the end of things. If you flick over the page to chapter, verses 27 to 30, and we see that Peter, by the end of it, he has got it. Verse 27, Jesus asks them, who do people say that I am? Well, they say everyone's giving the wrong answers, good answers, but wrong ones. Some say John the Baptist. Others say Elijah. And still others, one of the prophets.

But what about you? He asked. Who do you say that I am? Peter answered, you are the Messiah. Peter gets it. He's finally got it. He's finally clicked. He's got the identity of who Jesus is.

He can see that Jesus is God's rescuer. He understands that Jesus is the Christ. They can trust him and be rescued by him. But the question is, is what gets us to that point?

[17 : 53] And to answer that, we need to flick back over the page to look at verses 22 to 26. So, verse 22, they came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him.

He takes a blind man and leads him out of the village. And what Jesus does next is quite unusual in some ways. And normally when we think about Jesus doing a miracle, we just think about him saying a word, and the thing just happens, kind of from a distance, effortlessly. But this is up close.

It's really uncomfortably close. Verse 23, he took the blind man by the hands and led him outside the village. And when he spat on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, then Jesus asked, do you see anything?

And that doesn't even work initially, because verse 24, he can see, he sees people, they look like trees walking around. He can just see dim, blurry outlines. So then again, in verse 25, once more, Jesus put his hands on a man's eyes.

It doesn't happen straight away. Then he can see clearly. It's almost as if Jesus struggles to do it. And see, the blind man physically is what we and the disciples and the Pharisees and Herod are like spiritually.

[19 : 09] Just as he can't see the outside world by himself, so we, by ourselves, cannot understand the truth about Jesus. We are blind. And what we see here is we see that we need Jesus to open our blind eyes so that we can see what is true about him, that he is the Christ, that he is God's rescuer.

And this is the most important thing that we need him to do for us. And why it takes so long, why there seems to be so much effort and engagement, is not because Jesus can't do it quickly.

What he wants to teach us is that this is our biggest problem, the one he needs to put the most effort into solving. We need Jesus to do it for us, and we can't do it ourselves.

We need him to open our eyes, to give us sight, to understand that Jesus, who dies on the cross, is our rescuing king and saviour. And that is the nature of the rescue that Jesus is doing now.

He is a rescue of curing hardened hearts and giving sight to blind people. A rescue of giving understanding to people who have none.

[20 : 21] And to be saved by him, we need him to open our eyes. And it takes a miracle from Jesus for us to recognise him. I think it's passages like this that tell us why we love some of the songs that we sing and the lyrics of them, and why we love the lyrics in particular of Amazing Grace, written by John Newton, a 18th century captain of a slave trading ship, who described himself before he became a Christian, My whole life when awake was a course of most horrid impiety and profaneness.

Wicked and hard-hearted, someone who, by the mercy of God, became a Christian. And it's that famous first verse of the hymn, isn't it? Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.

I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see. Able to see that Jesus dying on the cross for our sin is our rescuer who loves us.

And if you're someone here and you know that Jesus is the Christ, you know him and trust him and want to live for him, well, the reason that we know that, that you know that, is that Jesus worked a miracle on your heart, on your eyes, so that you could see that.

You don't think that for no reason. There wasn't necessarily a rational weighing up of the evidence. What was needed was a miracle from him. And I think that gives us astonishing confidence, actually, because often when we look at ourselves, we think, well, I don't actually really feel that rescued.

[21 : 52] My situation actually looks the same. I kind of am basically seen to be the same person in myself. We can see that we have had our eyes opened. If we can see that Jesus is our rescuer, that he has died on the cross for us and we trust him to save us, and then Jesus has rescued us.

He has done an amazing thing for us in that. If we can see that Jesus crucified for us to die in our place, if we can see that and acknowledge that, that means we have been rescued by God.

We have been rescued now, with the full culmination of that to come in the new creation. It's the essential step that he has done for us. What we need to do is continue to believe in him.

He has given us spiritual sight, not because we did anything, but because he is kind and merciful. Or maybe you're here and you're just looking into things about Jesus.

You're curious about Jesus and who he is. I think the important thing to see is that Jesus says that the biggest problem for us is the problem that's on our insides and our hearts, but naturally do not want to believe in God.

[23 : 00] And he is the Christ. He is able to rescue you. And there is plenty of evidence for that. And I guess the call of this passage is to join with Peter in acknowledging that Jesus is the Christ.

He is the saviour. I think there's more kind of misunderstanding about this passage I want to address is that it could be possible to be fatalistic. If I need Jesus to do this miracle for me, well, he hasn't done a miracle for me, so that's kind of, you know, that's his fault really and not mine, so I'm okay not believing.

But I think that misunderstands what Jesus is like. Jesus will give sight to those who ask him for it. And that's what he's done all throughout Mark's gospel so far.

When people ask him for things, he gives them to them. To those who are humble, to those who admit that they don't understand. And like the woman we met last week in chapter 7, the Greek woman, and he says she has no right to Jesus' rescue, but asks him for it anyway.

Jesus doesn't say no. He doesn't withhold his mercy for those who ask him for it. And this is what the Pharisees won't do. They won't admit there's something wrong with them.

[24 : 10] For those who want eyes to see, Jesus will give sight. And I think there's a dynamic in which this plays into our ongoing life as Christians as well.

We kind of think we still struggle with ongoing blindness, and we don't graduate beyond this for ourselves. Just as now the disciples understand that Jesus is the Christ, but at the same time there are many things, as we continue to see in Mark's gospel, that they don't understand.

And we all have an unbelief problem, and it doesn't go away overnight. And the ongoing Christian life is a life of allowing Jesus to change and to challenge our unbelief.

I think this really affects how we think about ourselves as Christians and what we want Jesus to do for us now. Because I think it would be really tempting to turn up to a Bible study or to turn up to a church, basically kind of blasé, like, I know this kind of attitude.

And I think that's really dangerous for us as we follow Jesus. It shows that we don't really understand what we've been rescued from. I think what this passage encourages us to do is to be dependent on Jesus in an ongoing way.

[25 : 22] To know that week by week, what I need is spiritual sight from Jesus and of Jesus, that I might continue to trust him. And to come to his word, asking him, please help me to see what you want to show me about yourself.

Please help me to understand your words, that I might be more clear in my understanding of you. And I think that starts with an attitude of prayer, but then taking action to think, I need to spend time in God's word with other people to allow God to address my hardness of heart, to allow him to address my unbelief, to challenge me.

And I think there's one kind of final thing that this has amazing implications for us for. And it's about the nature of the rescue that Jesus is working. It's a rescue from hardened hearts and deaf ears and blind eyes.

So when we think about God at work now, what do we think about him doing? And what do we pray for people? And I think this passage just gives us wonderful clarity on what our mission is as we seek to reach the world with the good news about Jesus.

What the world needs is for Jesus to open people's eyes so that they can see who he is. And this just presents us with a glorious chance to join in with his work, to be right at the heartbeat of what God is doing now.

[26 : 37] And yes, one day God will return to make the world new and take him to be with us. And we wait patiently for that day. But now, this is the time when Jesus is opening blind eyes so that people can see who he is.

And wouldn't it make sense for us as a church and as individuals to be putting our efforts towards that, to try and to bring people into contact with Jesus? They can't meet him in person, but they can meet him in his words as he works now to open eyes.

And that is where people meet Jesus and can have that miracle done for them. As we speak about who Jesus is and his death, as we ask people to do things like read the Bible with us with stuff like Word One-to-One or Uncover.

Jesus works his rescue as he starts to soften hard hearts and open blind eyes. I was really struck last Sunday evening in the Real Lives event we had here with interviews from members of our church family.

what one of the people on the panel said, how he ended up joining a Bible study group and he fell in love with Jesus as he found him on the pages of Scripture. It probably didn't look like an awful lot was happening there to the outside world, just a bloke studying the Bible.

[27 : 51] But that is Jesus working his rescue and opening eyes. Let's pray. Let's pray. Father God, we thank you that you have mercy on us, that you give us what we need most, that when we ask you for it, you give us spiritual sight, not because of anything that we have done, but because of your mercy and love for us.

And thank you that it is what you did for Peter and the disciples then. And thank you that it is what you do for us now. And that in your mercy, you have opened our eyes so that we can see your rescue, see Jesus dying on the cross for us.

We ask that in each of our lives, you would continue to open our eyes so that we can more clearly see who you are. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.