

Seeing Jesus Clearly

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[0 : 0 0] Well everyone, can you remember going to watch a 3D movie, your first 3D movie? Who's seen a 3D movie?

Okay, some of us have not seen a 3D movie. You, alright, okay. What is the one thing you need if you go to a 3D movie if you're going to enjoy it? Glasses. But you know now you need the right pair of glasses now, don't you?

Because there's two types of 3D movies. There's the one with the red and the light, red and green. And then there's another one, Michiel can tell you what it is, it makes it stand out. If you take the wrong glasses, you're not going to see the movie clearly.

Or if you don't take any glasses, you're not going to see the movie clearly. And if you don't see it clearly, you can't follow it. You don't know what the movie is about. You're going to miss out on all the action and the fun, and 3D movies are mostly fun.

They don't do like, you know, heavy drama movies in 3D. It's things that must be shooting at you and lots of action. Well, today's lesson in the Gospel is all about seeing clearly and how that helps us follow Jesus better.

[1 : 0 5] And so welcome back to our series in the Gospel of Mark, which it's a Gospel of Mark, but I mean it's all about Jesus. And we've come at last to the central truth in the Gospel of Mark.

The central truth in the Gospel of Mark. And before we can fully understand what Mark wants us to get about Jesus, we need to look at a unique miracle that Jesus did, or rather that he didn't do.

We need to look at the miracle that didn't work. And so that's what you've got at the start of that section in Mark, chapter 8, the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida.

And Jesus is back in Bethsaida. That's Jewish territory. He's done that tour around in the Gentile territory. He's going to shortly shoot off again. Caesarea Philippi is north of Bethsaida.

It's in Canaanite territory again. And he's in Bethsaida, and people bring him a blind man to heal. And Jesus does his spitty, touchy thing again. And an interesting thing happens.

[2 : 1 1] His sight, this blind man's sight, is only partially restored. Not sure what kind of people are living in that part of the world, but they look like trees walking. He can't see.

He can see, but he can't really see yet. He can't see clearly. And so Jesus has to go in for a second time, and this time make sure he can see things clearly.

His sight has been fully restored. And what's going on here? Why does Mark place this story here, and why does Jesus need to do a double healing? Does Jesus need to do a double healing?

Is it so difficult for him to heal a blind man? Not so far in the story of Mark. He's been able to do anything he needs. And so this two-step miracle has been put here. It's a two-step miracle about sight.

And it's to act as a kind of visible parable for the point that Jesus makes in the next story. Just like the man born blind, who needs a two-step process to see clearly, there are two important central truths that Mark wants us to get about Jesus if we're to see Jesus clearly.

[3 : 21] So back to our question. What is the central truth that Mark wants us to get about Jesus? What is it that we must have clear, crystal clear, in our minds when we think of Jesus?

Well, the first thing that we need to understand, in order to see Jesus clearly, we need to know that he is the Christ. Your translation might have Messiah. So the first central truth, or reality, the thing that Jesus wants us to get about him, is that he is the Christ.

The whole Gospel of Mark has been moving up to this point in the story. Yes, Mark introduces Jesus right at the start as the Christ, the Son of God, Mark chapter 1. But that's Mark. That's a narrative point that Mark has put in.

No one in the story has called Jesus Christ up to this point. So Jesus is the Christ. He's the Messiah. What does that mean? Christ is not an English word. By now, you should know what Christ means.

By now, you should know, St. Mark, that Christ is a title. It comes from the Old Testament. What language is Christ? You should know by now. Greek.

[4 : 34] Okay, so just so you know, the word Christ is a Greek word. It's just an English transliteration. Give me the Hebrew word of Christ. Messiah. What is the direct English translation of Messiah?

Anointed one. Anointed one. Really, it means that he's the king of the Old Testament kingdom of Israel. Remember how they made kings in those days?

They didn't put crowns on them. The prophet would take oil, pour it on the new king's head, and that's why he was anointed. At the same time, receiving the Holy Spirit to do this task of being the Messiah.

Jesus is the Christ. It's not a surname. I've got to say this. It's not a surname. Jesus wasn't born to Mr. and Mrs. Christ. I've told us this before. Christ is a title.

You see, by the time you get later on in the New Testament, you say, oh, Jesus Christ. Oh, Dylan Murray. Mark from the Mavid. No, no, no. If it was applied to me, it would be Dylan the King. It's a title, and it tells us the central, most important thing we can know about Jesus.

[5 : 46] That he is the king of God's kingdom. So everything else we know about Jesus has got to be wrapped up in this title, Christ. And that he's the king of God's kingdom makes him, automatically makes him the most important person in human history.

Because the king of God's kingdom is going to be the king of the kingdoms of the world. Lots of kings there. The king of God's kingdom, Israel, Old Testament Israel, isn't going to stay the king of Israel.

He is going to become the kings of the kingdoms of the world. And this again is highlighted, this is highlighted again and again in the Old Testament. That God is going to fix the problems of the world through the person of the Messiah, of the Christ, of his king.

You might need to turn with me in your Bibles to Psalm 72. I'm just going to give you a quick job role of what the description of the Messiah is going to be. So keep your hand in Mark 8 if you can.

And find your way back into the middle of the Bible to Psalm 72. Just want to show you the kind of, what the Old Testament says about the Messiah.

[6 : 57] This is one of many, many, many places we could have chosen. Okay, Psalm 72. It's a psalm about Solomon or by Solomon. And it's about the king of the Jews.

The king of God's kingdom. Verse 1. Endow the king with your justice, O God. The royal son with your righteousness. He will judge your peoples in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice.

I'm going to go all the way down to verse 11. Still talking about the king. All kings will bow down to him. And all nations will serve him.

Now this partially became true in Solomon's time. Remember how many people flocked to Solomon? The queen of Sheba. Do you remember that? So this was coming true in Solomon's time. But only a fraction of the kings of the world was bowing down to him.

So this is still to happen. And why will these nations serve him? Have a look at verse 12 onwards. For, because this king will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted ones who have no one to help.

[8 : 02] He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death. He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight.

Okay, lovely description of what the Messiah is going to do. Why is it so important to see Jesus as the Christ? Okay? The Messiah. And notice we're putting the phrase the in.

The Christ. The Messiah. That tells you it's a title. Well, it's because so many people, even today, still don't think of Jesus primarily as the Messiah. Notice how Jesus asks initially, back in Mark 8, Who do people say I am?

Verse 27 and 28. Who do people say I am? And the disciples answered, well, some think that you're John the Baptist. Remember this time John the Baptist had died, so it's got to be kind of a new John the Baptist.

Or maybe Elijah, or one of the prophets. Now to see Jesus like that is, of course, not to see him clearly. It's not to know who he is. To miss seeing him as the Christ is not to see him.

[9 : 12] And so many people see him like that still today. Maybe they see him as a good man. A man potentially even sent from God. A kind of social justice warrior who challenges the status quo.

Maybe he's someone who is a good example to follow. Oh yeah, I love people. Don't live for yourself. Forgive others. They choose one or two little things when it suits them.

But this is to sell Jesus too short of his royal calling, because he is much, much more than a prophet, than a man from God, than someone to follow. Well then, honestly, he is those things as well.

But we also need to be aware that Jesus is also not sometimes too clearly seen in Christian circles either. Too often we think of him as a kind of BFF.

Best friends forever. When you ask someone who Jesus is, oh, he's just everything to me. Everything. He loves me. He's just love.

[10 : 13] Now, yes, Jesus can be those things, but we can too easily diminish his worldwide kingly rule to a tiny little place in my heart.

There's one of the old Christian songs, you ask me how I know he lives? We don't sing it anymore. He lives within my heart. Well, yes, but no. He mustn't just live in your heart.

We're not to have him in our heart and then keep him there, so that the only place we think he should rule is our private, personal, inward spiritual lives or our moral choices.

We can also maybe over-spiritualize his kingship and see him only as a spiritual king that's come to take us away from the world and go and live with him in heaven when we die.

Both of these views have too narrow a view of Jesus. They're not seeing Jesus clearly as the biblical Messiah. This brings us to the problem that Peter had.

[11 : 17] Because although he was seeing Jesus as the Messiah, his sight was still defective. He was only seeing half the picture. Peter had to see that Jesus, as the Christ, had to suffer and die.

And he was just not prepared to accept that vision of Jesus yet. So the first thing Mark wants us to see, to see Jesus as the Christ. But that's only half seeing Jesus if you see him only one way.

You've got to see him another way as well. Still seeing him as the Christ, but seeing that the Christ must suffer and die. Let's have a look at verse 31 to 33.

Jesus begins to teach them. He says, yes, you're the Christ. Good, that's half the answer. He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed.

And after three days rise again. He spoke plenty about this. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. Now that's not just a soft, hey, Jesus, listen, just come.

[12 : 28] I just want to check something with you. Can I ask? Are you sure? That rebuke is, whoa! No, no, no. You're not allowed to say those things. It's a strong thing. It's the same word Jesus used with the demons when they confronted him.

No! Get out! So Peter's like, no, you don't dare say that! Is it very loud when I do that? Sorry. Well, just block your ears because there's something more.

Jesus turned and looked at his disciples. He rebuked Peter. Get behind me, Satan. Or in other ways, get away, Satan! Footseek!

Stop it! Stop it! This whole thing escalated very fast. You're not setting your minds on the things of God, but the things of man. Now, why is this such a shock to Peter?

When Jesus starts speaking about being rejected and dying, why did he react strongly to this? And why does Jesus give him an equally strong admonition back? The problem is with what Peter's expectations of what the Christ, the Messiah, had come to do.

[13 : 34] These expectations stem from the Bible, but what happened is that over the course of time, people picked and chose the bits that suited them.

And they created a Messiah to their own liking, almost like in their own image, if you will. One of the more popular visions of the Messiah was that he was there to smash God's enemies, and in first century Israel, that meant one target, and that's the Romans.

Having said that, there were so many different versions of what the Messiah was going to do. There were pockets of little Jewish groups all over the place, and some of them would, if you weren't doing what they told you to do in the way that they told you to do it, God isn't going to defeat all the enemies, including the other Jews.

So just there it would survive. God, through the Messiah, would come and destroy everyone but their little group. Well, let me give you a representative taste of what the Jews were hoping to see in the Messiah. Now, this is from the Psalms of Solomon.

Have you got it? There we go, the Psalms of Solomon, chapter 17. Now, this is not in the Bible. It sounds like it is, but it was writings that the Jews had at the time. The Messiah will destroy the unrighteous rulers, purge Jerusalem from Gentiles.

[14 : 48] He will trample her to destruction in wisdom and in righteousness. He will drive out the sinners from their inheritance. He will smash the arrogance of sinners like a potter's jar. He will destroy the godless nations with the word of his mouth.

The heathen nations will serve him under his yoke, and he shall purge Jerusalem, making it holy as of old. Now, compare that with Psalm 72 and see what a different vision the Bible has for the biblical Messiah.

Now, what's missing from this one is any sense of grace or mercy, or indeed that there could be any problem with the Jewish people themselves. Here, the problem is our enemies, the Gentiles.

We're okay. God must come and deal with them because we're obviously fine. But as we've seen, Jesus has not been slow to point out the deficiencies, the problems with his own people.

Just a few weeks ago, do you remember? They've all got unclean hearts. They all need repentance. They all need forgiveness. And you can see why this kind of creates problems for Peter.

[15 : 50] He's got the Psalms of Solomon in his mind. The Messiah has come to destroy their enemies, not to be destroyed by them. Least of all by God's own people.

Do you notice who's going to reject and make Jesus suffer and kill him? Have a look again. Verse 31. The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law, his own people.

This is why Peter rebukes Jesus like that. He's looking forward to all the spoils of war that this Messiah is going to give him, and the prestige that comes from being close to the king when he comes into power.

So Peter is being self-interested. He wants Jesus to be a Messiah to serve his needs and wants, his interests. And Jesus gives a rebuking, no, you're here to serve my interests.

Seeing Jesus as the Messianic king, like a David who will defeat the Romans and rule over Israel again, is still selling Jesus too short.

[17 : 04] It's still not seeing him clearly. That is all he did. History would still be stuck in this endless cycle of war and peace and war. Nothing would have changed. That's what the Messiahs did in the Old Testament.

People's hearts would still be hard. Self-interest would still call the shots. Power and might would still be the order of the day. For Jesus to be the Messiah that actually changes things, he has to do a much deeper, a much more foundational work than mere top-heavy regime change.

He wants to fix the root of the problem. And we've seen in the Gospel of Mark that that has something to do with the human heart and the problem of sin. And in order to fix that problem, the Messiah has to be rejected, he has to suffer, and he has to die.

That's why passages like Isaiah 53 are so important for us. Maybe you want to flip back and just read a few verses with me. Isaiah 53.

I'm just going to read from verse 3. If you're in Isaiah, just notice that this section doesn't start in chapter 53.

[18 : 18] It actually starts in chapter 52, at the end of chapter 52. There's a heading there, in NIV at least, it's called The Suffering and Glory of the Servant. You've got that? Let's talk about the servant of Yahweh.

See, my servant will act wisely at the end of chapter 52. He'll be exalted. And the reason is, chapter 53 from verse 3, He was despised and rejected by mankind.

A man of suffering and familiar with pain. Verse 4, Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering. We considered him punished by God and stricken and afflicted.

Pierced for our transgressions, crushed for... See the transfer there? Pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities.

Yes, we can get peace, but it comes at the cost to him. By his wounds we've been healed. The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

[19 : 20] Now Jesus knows that he has to do this vital work if he's going to be the Messiah that changes history. He has to be the Messiah that changes people's hearts. And the plan of God, the only way to do that is to die a sacrificial death.

And in doing so, free his people from slavery to sin. And this is the part that Peter's got a blind spot for. He just had no idea. That being the Messiah involved defeat and death.

But to Jesus, it's crystal clear. To see him properly, we need to see him as the Messiah. But to see him clearly, we need to see him as the Messiah that dies. I guess because the biggest blind spot we have is our own sin.

Let's do a quick check-in then. Does our vision of Jesus include both that he is the Messiah and that he is the Messiah that has sacrificed his life to ensure that we, you and me, get to participate in his kingdom?

Or maybe you think his death was unimportant or unnecessary. You know, the people that see Jesus as a good man, they don't take his death into account. They're like, yeah, yeah, shame, you know.

[20 : 32] If they think that he died at all. Oh, well, he must have died, but they don't think he died on the cross sometimes. Because only those who see the need for Jesus to be their sacrifice get to share in the benefits of having him as the Messiah.

Before we get there, there's one more shock for Peter, and perhaps it's the biggest one of all. Jesus as the Messiah wants his people to follow him in the same path of sacrifice and death.

Can you imagine Peter at this point? Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. Yes, you're the Messiah. Fantastic. I'm going to have to die. No, no, you don't have to die. You're going to live. No, no. I want you to die.

Okay. Okay. That's fine. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Listen, where did this all go wrong? I thought we were going to get the nations of the world and conquer everything. And so the third truth we've got to get, well, this is really the second truth.

The first one is split into two. Christ is the Messiah. The Messiah must die. You want to see Jesus clearly. But to follow Jesus truly, the second truth in this passage, we've got to follow the path of denial and sacrifice.

[21 : 43] Read again from verse 34. That means to reject.

It's a rejecting word. Reject himself. And take up his cross and follow me. Whoever would save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels will save it.

What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and yet lose his life or forfeit his soul? What can man give in return for his life when it's gone?

Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him, will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

Okay. So this is where the rubber hits the road. Yes, we want Jesus as a Messiah that's victorious. Mmm, Messiah that's dying. Okay, look, you do the dying. Now you want me to do the dying.

[22 : 46] Oh. You know that scene in the movie? This stuff is about to get real. Jesus has now been an unstoppable force in the gospels.

Now suddenly he begins to talk of suffering and defeat. To follow someone who goes along the same path, what do you think that's going to require from you?

Hey, I'm going to go die. I want you to follow me. What is that going to require of people now to follow Jesus? Commitment. Courage. We're not talking about any death here.

We'll get to that in a second. Bravery. Faith or trust. Inner strength or fortitude. Jesus doesn't want any fair weather friends or followers.

He wants followers with integrity, determination and grit because that's what it's going to take to follow someone down the path that he's going to go. We mustn't water this down to a sanitized version of bearing up under some small inconvenience.

[23 : 46] Oh, I need to bear my cross. They asked me to do the door duty. I don't know how they got in there. At church again. I need to bear my... This could be a guy as well.

I need to bear my cross. So grumpy. So and so is called and spoke to me for 26 and a half minutes. I just need to bear my cross. I just need to sacrifice a small little thing. This is not what Jesus talks about when he talks about carrying your cross.

Jesus is talking about life and death stuff here. Taking up your cross meant going to your death. It was the last thing you did as you took the death march and died one of the most horrible, painful and shameful deaths devised by man.

You didn't talk about this kind of thing in polite society. Today the cross is a trinket and an ornament. In the first century it was an image of the most extreme repugnance. A symbol of cruelty, pain, dehumanization, suffering, everything rolled into one, and shame.

Not for nothing do we get the word excruciating from it. So what is exactly that Jesus wants from us here? Well, you must deny yourself. Jesus calls for a radical abandonment.

[25 : 04] You've got to reject yourself. You've got to reject your own ideas, the things that you want, your own goals, the things that you hate, the things that you love, the things that you want. You must have nothing to do with yourself, but offer everything you have and everything you are to Jesus as an instrument of his kingdom and his kingship.

That's hard stuff. Maybe the closest analogy we can get to this is becoming a soldier in an army.

Remember Jesus is a king? And if you call a whole bunch of people together, what is the normal thing they're going to expect to do? Hey, let's go do something. Well, when a king calls a bunch of people to do something, it's normally called an army.

To follow a king means you're under his authority. We don't... In the Western world, we don't have kings. We've got leaders, but no one really thinks that we're under their authority.

Well, we know we are, but not like in the olden days. You know, you'd bend your... Bow your knee, swear fealty and allegiance. You know, the cool things they used to do. You take orders from him.

[26 : 12] To go into the army is to give up your freedom to do what you want and to realize that you belong to someone else. Someone bigger. Something bigger. Someone more powerful than yourself.

And what... What's more... What every soldier knows is that you can only become a good soldier when you know that you're going to die. When you're in a war, you've got to give up the fact that you might survive.

You've got to just know, I'm probably going to die, and then you become an effective soldier. Now... That's heavy. Remember Saving Private Ryan?

Those war movies? I'm not sure too many of us have been in a war situation. Some of us would have served. But to serve with those bullets flying at you, and to know that you could die, and then to keep on doing the things you're supposed to be doing, once you've made peace with that, you become an effective soldier.

One that can make a difference to the battle or to the war that you're fighting. But like every great sacrifice, this is going to take blood and sweat and tears. This is a huge challenge for us, modern Christians, isn't it?

[27 : 19] Especially in the modern world where everything is tailor-made to give us comfort and luxury. Ah, we've got the Black Friday deals coming up. Bye. I had crazy stuff that was offered to me this week.

A lovely little water fountain to sit in my garden. You know, like, what is this? To live a life of ease and leisure. Mind you, it would be quite nice, actually. A little water fountain there. Okay, how willing, how prepared are we to give up everything for the sake of Jesus?

What about being willing to face shame and ridicule now when they start laughing at you and saying what an idiot you are? Isn't it better to rather face that now, though?

To face it now in front of people who are going to die, short time of shame and laughing, rather than in front of Jesus and the Father and the angels and miss out on the glory to come.

The fact is, we're all going to lose everything anyway. We can gain everything we want in this life, but once you die, it's all over. Jesus promises that if you give up everything now by following him, you get a chance at getting it all back.

[28 : 31] Whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel will save it. So to see Jesus clearly is to see him as the Messiah who will suffer and die, but remember, also be raised again.

To follow Jesus truly, we are called to follow the same path of rejection, suffering and death, but we get to share in the same rewards of honor and vindication and life.

And that should help us to follow Jesus better. Shall we end in prayer? Dear Lord Jesus, you are the King of God's kingdom and we are your subjects.

We are reminded again of the great call that you've put on our lives. It's a call that we love to answer, but fall short so many times.

Lord Christ, send us your Holy Spirit. Keep on working in our hearts and minds to follow you to our day's end. To stay faithful and true to you no matter what.

[29 : 41] And to rise with you again to eternal life. Amen.