

Grace and Peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Mark's gospel has 16 chapters. Chapters 1-7 picture Jesus and his disciples traveling throughout Galilee and Gentile regions nearby teaching the Kingdom of God, gifting repentance and faith to many, casting out demons, healing the sick, raising the dead, walking on water, calming storms, feeding 5000 at one time, and 4000 another.

In chapter eight Jesus leaves Galilee with the disciples for Jerusalem to His death and resurrection. The journey begins with the healing of a blind man. It reads like this:

*And they came to Bethsaida. And they brought a blind man to Jesus and implored Him to touch him. Taking the blind man by the hand, He brought him out of the village; and after spitting on his eyes and laying His hands on him, He asked him, "Do you see anything?" And he looked up and said, "I see men, for I see [them] like trees, walking around." Then again He laid His hands on his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored, and [began] to see everything clearly.*

The healing of the blind man asks a spiritual question: how clearly do I see Jesus? To see Jesus healing the sick and calming storms of Mark 1-7 is to see Him as 'a man like trees walking'. While it is a true picture, it's not a complete picture of Jesus.

The full picture is seeing Jesus as fully God becoming fully human...having to live a perfect life because I am incapable of living perfectly...willingly taking God's just wrath against my sin to the death I deserve to die...so that I can be forgiven of my sin and be restored to God, worshipping Him through a life of service.

The disciples will struggle greatly over the image of Jesus going to Jerusalem to die and rise again that is recorded in Mark 8-16.

This struggle begins right after the blind man's healing. Mark records Jesus asking: "Who do people say that I am?" Peter answered: "You are the Christ." And Jesus began to teach them: "the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again". Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked Him. And Jesus rebuked Peter saying: "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." Then, Jesus called the disciples and said this: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

That the Son of Man 'must suffer', 'be rejected', 'be killed', and 'rise again' were words that did not fit the disciples 1<sup>st</sup> Century picture of the Messiah. The first three words, 'must suffer', 'be rejected', 'be killed', spoken by Jesus and applied to Himself, threw the disciples minds into confusion and denial. For 21<sup>st</sup> Century believers who may be confused about the disciple's confusion, how easy it is to read these words too casually, without reflecting on this costly, self-sacrificial gift from Christ on our behalf.

And as Jesus works to reframe the disciples confusion and denial, we too are called to ponder His passion about *setting our minds on the things of God...denying our self...taking up our cross...following Him.*

As Jesus nears Jerusalem, He predicts His passion for the third time from Mark 10: *“See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. <sup>34</sup> And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.”*

James and John ask Jesus: *“Give us the privilege to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your ‘glory’.”* Jesus responded: *“You do not know what you are asking.”* Indeed! For James and John *‘glory’* was a picture of power and privilege; for Jesus *‘glory’* is the Cross and two robbers, instead of James and John, were at His right and left as He died.

Jesus then reframes the disciples confusion about power and privilege: *“...whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

As Jesus journey to Jerusalem began with the healing of a blind man, it ends with the healing of Bartimaeus, a physically blind man who saw Jesus 20/20 in contrast with the disciples, who continued to see Jesus as *‘a man like trees walking.’*

Bartimaeus *followed Jesus along the way*, seeing Jesus clearly. The disciples yet see Jesus clearly. How about us? Our Holy Week 2021 world is evil, deceptive and sinister. How will we navigate this fallen world with eyes on the Cross...on which the Creator of the Universe died so that He might reconcile all things to Himself.

Things to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest as we ponder His Passion 2021.

1. Because this world is fallen and cannot rescue itself from its own evil, the Cross on which Christ died is the most important event in all history...
2. ...for on the Cross the Creator of the Universe took on human flesh and blood, lived the perfect life I am incapable of living, exchanged his perfect life for my imperfect life, drank the cup of God’s wrath against my sin, died an innocent death as a perfect sacrifice for ALL sin...to reconcile all things to Himself.
3. ...that the Cross is the seed-bed of a servant’s heart – a daily commitment to be Christ’s bondservant; to study Him until I think His thoughts, speak His words as He lives His life through me in those places in which He has given me influence...so that Christ may reconcile all things to Himself through every believer everywhere.
4. ...and believing, along with the Apostle Paul, that “for me to live is Christ, to die is gain,” yet taking advantage of each day to finish Kingdom business of reconciling the world to Himself that He has given me.

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