

Mark 8:22-38

“Clearing Things Up”

If you've walked with the Lord for any length of time you've surely discovered by now that God's ways are not our ways. God doesn't think like we think. The way this world programs us to operate as mankind is virtually the exact opposite of the way things work in the kingdom of God. As a matter of fact Jesus went on record saying, *“For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.”* Luke 16:15 The specific context being a lover of money, placing priority upon pursuing the treasures of this world. But no doubt the statement is applicable in all kinds of different categories; the mentality of man (apart from the Spirit of God) is simply messed up. To us the way God does things seems backwards, but that's because *we're* backwards. God's not the One with the problem, He's not the One with strange ideas, we're the one's with perverted perspectives, messed up mentalities having been twisted and warped through the fall and this sin nature that we've inherited. Consequently it sorta baffles us when we learn that in the kingdom of God the way up is down, that in order to gain we need to give, that if we want to be recognized as great in the kingdom of God then we need to become the servant of all. The world teaches you to look out for #1, step on who you need to, take advantage of who you need to, assert yourself and do what you need to do to claw your way to the top. How do I know when I'm on top? When I'm able to lord authority over you, when I have you here to serve me, and it's not about giving what I can, it's about getting what I can. and When we come to Christ it shocks us, we're stunned to see how much different things operate and how little we truly understand about Jesus, His nature, and what it means to follow Him.

As we approach our passage of scripture today we find the disciples still on that learning curve. There are things that they still don't understand; Jesus even said to them there in Vs 21, “How is it that you do not understand?” So then as you might imagine the passage that's before us is all about clarification, Jesus seeks to give them insight and understanding: and He gives them an explanation of God's plan, and God's purpose both for *Him* and those who would follow after Him.

I've broken the remainder of this Ch up into 4 basic segments that I've labeled, *curing, confessing, confusing, and clarifying*. In Vs 22-26 we find Jesus miraculously *curing* a blind man, Vs 27-30 we find Peter *confessing* that Jesus is the Christ, in Vs 31-33 we find the situation become *confusing* to the disciples when Jesus begins to speak of His messianic mission and how it would play out. and Then finally in Vs 34-38 Jesus is *clarifying* the fact that not only will His life be laid down but in reality *anyone* who would follow Him would have to be willing to lose his/her life as well. That our priorities would have to shift from the kingdom of this world to the kingdom of God, from the priority of self to the denial of self, and submitting ourselves to the will and the word of God.

I kinda wish we'd have had the time last week to study these 1st 5 Vs because they flow better with the previous passage. Be that as it may let's dive in.

Vs22-26

Jesus seems to be on a roll here of strange and seemingly awkward encounter miracles doesn't He? In Ch 7 we seen Him stick His fingers in a deaf man's ears, spit, touch his tongue and then heal the man as He spoke the word to Him. Here He spits in this blind man's eyes and then says, "Tell Me what you see?" It's like; is it just me or does that seem a little weird to you?

He says, "I see men like trees walking." Which is exactly what you'd expect the man's looking through spit! You gotta wipe that stuff out! ;o)

Few things we want to consider in this passage. We note that Jesus was in Bethsaida when they brought a blind man to Him, but before Jesus healed him He took Him out of town, why? (and There in Vs 23 I suspect that this man didn't have a clue that He was the single most privileged person on the face of the earth in that moment, he actually had Jesus leading him literally by the hand, what a beautiful thing. What a great thing to have Jesus take you by the hand and say, "Walk with me; I'll lead you.") Why did Jesus take him outside the city limits (so to speak)? Well, we don't read of it in Mark's gospel but we find out in Matt's gospel that there came a time in Jesus' ministry whereby He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works were done because even though He'd done so many radical things there, they still didn't believe in Him, they didn't repent. and Guess what? Bethsaida was on that list. Remember He said, "*Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you.*" Matt 11:21-22 So this is a city that's had it's witness and yet has still rejected Jesus; it's a city under judgment. So Jesus isn't manifesting anymore miracles there, they've had their chance and have opted to reject the Lord. Therefore it seems that when they bring this man to Him, He takes him outside the city.

and Jesus then spits in His eyes, puts His hands on Him and asks him if he sees anything. Now as for why exactly Jesus spit in his eyes I have no idea, there are all kinds of thoughts, that's all they are. We know that Jesus can't be patterned; He works in different way in different situations and if this is how He wanted to work He was free to. This much I'll guarantee you, if you need prayer here and you come forward after service; we don't employ the "spitting" method. There may be hands laid on you, we'll leave the spit out. But I think we should learn from this that we can expect Jesus to move is ways that we don't expect.

Vs 24 and 25 give us the only miracle (at least on record) that Jesus ever did "in stages" or *gradually/progressively*. Generally when Jesus healed someone it was instantaneous, but here it took more than one touch, what's up with that? Was it a lack of power in Jesus? No, was it a lack of faith in the man? Perhaps, but the bible doesn't tell us that. Do you remember last week when we spoke of the fact that Jesus would often utilize His miracles as object lessons for His disciples, and that there were deeper things that He wanted to teach them, to teach us through them if we'd only have eyes to see, ears to hear? It seems to me that this particular miracle is no exception to that general rule and this is why this work flows so well with the previous passage. Back in Vs 17 of this Ch Jesus said (read Vs 17-18)

In essence He said, "Can't you see Me? Don't you understand me? Can you not perceive who I am, having eyes do you not see?" and After this He takes them through a series of steps in order to "open their eyes" to see Him clearly. You see, in Vs 24 the man basically says, "I

can see but things aren't real clear; things are still fuzzy." (and We deduct from this that this man hadn't always been blind because he knew what trees looked like, he compared what he was seeing to walking trees, no doubt he was referring to the disciples around Jesus). Then Jesus touched Him again and he saw everyone clearly. I believe Jesus is seeking to show His disciples that they're right where this man was at. They'd been touched by Jesus, but things were still fuzzy to them, they weren't seeing things clearly yet, but by the time Jesus was finished with them things would be made clear. Why? Because if Jesus begins a work (Vs 24) He'll finish the work (Vs25).

and This has such application to you and to me because this is to an extent where we all are.

All of us who know the Lord, have been touched by the Lord, we were blind but now we see. However we don't see things as clearly as we'd like to think we do, we don't see Jesus, and we don't see others in a way that's perfectly clear. Too often we see men like trees, they *stump* us, we feel the urge to *cut them down*, we want them to *leave* and all the rest. We need Christ to touch us again, and again, and again so that gradually, progressively things become clearer and clearer. After all what are the 2 greatest commandments? #1 "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*" Matt 22:37 and #2, "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*" Matt 22:39 How many of us have mastered those 2 commandments, they're crystal clear in our lives, lived out perfectly? But here's the good news, Jesus isn't finished with us. Will we get there on this side of heaven? No, not totally; the bible says, "*For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.*" 1 Cor 13:12 John tells us in his 1st epistle that when Jesus is revealed *then* we shall be like Him for we shall *see Him* as He is. Right now we do our best to see, we struggle, we strain, but so much is just fuzzy to us. But Jesus has begun the work; and this we know, "*...He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.*" Phil 1:6

In reality this is how *most* of the Lord's work happens in us, occasionally we might receive a miraculous touch, a catalyst that spurs on our growth at an accelerated rate. But for the most part it's little by little, it's progressive, it's gradual, but He's begun the work and He'll be faithful to finish it. and One day, when we're in His presence we'll look up; and see everyone and everything clearly. Maybe there's an area in your life right now that seems a little fuzzy to you, you can't make out what's going on or see things in a right way, your vision is blurred by bitterness, you've been offended by that guy, or felt overlooked in the other situation, or are simply needing some further clarification on something in your life right now that's quite frankly just confusing. Ask the Lord to touch you again, and again, and if necessary again, look up until things *clear up*.

Vs27-30

Peter's confession; this is one of those very familiar yet incredibly powerful portions of scripture. Jesus takes His disciples, leaves the area of Bethsaida and heads another 25 miles north to the area of Caesarea Philippi. and As He's making conversation with His disciples He says, "Who do men say that I am?" You know, "What's the pulse of the people concerning Me? What's the word on the street?" Now Jesus wasn't like us, don't think He was asking this

because of an inferiority complex, or wanted to be reassured that people liked Him, what they thought of Him; no, this was a lead question.

Around the 4th of July I was in one of the fireworks tents that the youth was working. and Having signs and all people knew it was a tent from our church, my hair was down, I was in shorts just kinda hanging out. We invited this family out to our VBS and this guy commences to tell me that he's been to CC but since he's been married he's gone with his wife to another church. He says, "I keep trying to get her to go out there though, I tell her, 'You've got to check out this pastor, he's not normal!" and I thought, "Who do men say that I am..." evidently that I'm not normal, I'm not sure what he meant by that. But that's not what was going on here.

So they tell Him, "Well, some say J.B." That one's a bit hard to swallow, Jesus and John were contemporary, John was hardcore turn or burn kinda guy, Jesus was more laid back. However they both preached repentance, the fact that the kingdom of God was at hand, we know that Herod purported that Jesus was J.B. back from the dead so, that's what some people thought, He must be J.B. Others said, "Elijah" of course Elijah being renown for the radical miracles that were worked through him, the fact that the scriptures prophesy him going before the coming of the Lord and all of that, some said, "He must be Elijah." Basically it seems that people didn't know exactly *what* to make of Him. The common people liked Him, thought highly *of* Him, but their opinion of Him fell far short. Jesus was *way* more than a preacher, He was *way* more than a prophet. Look at Vs 29 (read)

If that Vs isn't underlined in your bible, do yourself a favor and make it so. Highlight, memorize it, internalize it, it's the single most critical question you could ever be confronted with. Here's the deal, all kinds of people have all kinds of opinions about Jesus, that's all fine and well. What's important is, "Who do *you* say that I am?" You see how very personal Jesus made that. As far as *your heart and mind is concerned* who is Jesus? and You have to know that all of eternity hinges on your response to that question, it's that important.

When you breathe your last you're not going to see Peter before the pearly gates wanting to dialogue with you as to why you should be let in. The question won't be, "What have you done to deserve to be here?" It won't be, "Who do men say that I am?" The question is settled here and now, "Who do *you* say that I am?" "Well, my mom and dad said," I don't care what your mom and dad said, "Well, my preacher says," don't care what your preacher says, "Well, this guy at work..." you see it's not about what anyone else thinks or says. What do *you* think, who do *you* say Jesus is? and You should know there's another aspect to this, if who you say Jesus is falls short of the truth about Jesus, it won't do you any good. "I say Jesus was a national reformer." Sorry, that falls short, "I say Jesus was a prophet, even spoke for God." Sorry, that falls short, if you say (from your heart) that Jesus is anything less than what the word of God declares of Him your answer is insufficient and you will not be saved.

Peter said, "You are *the Christ.*" and In Matt's gospel we read that he said, "The Son of the Living God." and We read there that Jesus looked at Peter and said, "*Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.*" Matt 16:17-18 The revelation of Jesus as the Christ, the Anointed Savior sent to redeem mankind is so radical that you can't even go there apart from God revealing to you. If God doesn't open your eyes to that, you'll never see it. God

wants to reveal that to you, are you truly open to hearing from Him on it, you know that makes for things like accountability, responsibility, submitting to Him, surrendering to Him for the forgiveness of your sin. Not everyone *wants* to know the truth, their happy in their own little bubble of naivety thinking I'm ok, you're ok, we're all ok, we're not all ok. We're sinners in need of a Savior. Jesus said, "You are Peter, (this little rock) and on this massive boulder (this rock, the rock of the confession of Jesus as the Christ) I will build My church." At the foundation of the church is the confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, if that's not your confession, your not apart of the church.

Vs30

Why? #1 It wasn't time; the word regarding Jesus Messiah would spread like wildfire *after* the resurrection, not before. #2 There was all kinds of wrong concepts about the Messiah out there that He didn't want to be associated with. People believed that the Messiah would be a political figure, a man who would come in and overthrow the iron heel of Rome's oppressive boot and liberate Israel as a nation. Even the disciples might unintentionally mislead people concerning Him because they themselves didn't understand the nature of His mission (remember Vs 17-18), *who* He is was clear to them, *why He was here* was not. Notice

Vs31-33

So we go from Peter's confession, to mass *confusion* among the disciples. (and This marks the ½ way point in Mark's gospel and starts the next major section of the book, from here all paths lead to Jerusalem, they're with in 6 months of the cross). But notice that Jesus never revealed who He was apart from drawing attention to His work of redemption.

Because our salvation is directly dependant upon His redemptive work upon the cross, the sinless Son of God can not save anyone apart from the shedding of His blood, paying the penalty for the sin of the world. The fact that He walked around sinless is awesome, but that doesn't save us. Our salvation is found in the death and the resurrection of Christ, the fact that He was sinless is what qualified Him to die for us.

But you can sense the confusion, He begins to tell them, "You're right about who I am, and here's what's going to happen. I'm going to go to Jerusalem and be rejected and suffer tremendously at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the scribes. They'll have Me put to death, and after 3 days I'll rise again." and I'm just going to tell you that upon hearing that they began to short circuit, they're not computing, their hard drive just locked up, they didn't even hear, "rise again."

"Jesus didn't we just establish that You're the Messiah? The Son of God sent to save us? What's all this talk about death, further more, we're with You, what happens to You happens to us, the Messiah doesn't die Jesus, He rules and reigns, He's a man of power and might, He sets us free, sets things right, annihilates our enemies." Their problem was both theological and practical. and They were right, the scriptures did declare the liberating ministry of the Messiah, *"Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this."* Isa 9:7 and Jesus would set things right both politically and practically...just *not yet*. There was a higher priority, a higher liberty that man was in need of, salvation and freedom from sin. and The way Messiah

would deal with that was very different than what they'd anticipated. But the scriptures were equally clear. Leave the gospel of Mark turn to Isaiah 53 (read).

Daniel prophesied that Messiah would be cut off, David spoke in detail about the torture of the cross in Ps 22, the fact of the resurrection in the 2nd psalm and other passages, it was all there. But for some reason (human nature I suppose) Israel had a tendency to draw out the passages dealing with victory and power, and not really grab hold of the suffering Servant sent to die for the sin of the world. So as soon as they identified Jesus, He began to teach them about the nature of His mission.

Peter (having just heard from God regarding the revelation of the Christ) pulls Jesus aside and begins to *rebuke* Him. "Lord, what are You talking about? Didn't we just establish the fact that You're the Messiah? There's not going to be anymore of this 'cross' talk You got it, it's not going to happen, You're going to rule and reign, not suffer and die."

Vs33

Wow! Jesus rebukes Peter in the presence of all the disciples no doubt because they all felt the same way. and Jesus says, "You may've just heard from God Peter, but now you're being used as a messenger of Satan." Did you catch that? Jesus isn't calling Peter Satan here, He's saying that what he's saying is satanically inspired. Did Peter realize he was being used of the enemy here? No way, or else he'd have never said it. Did he realize God was speaking to him just a minute ago, I doubt it, that's Jesus pointed it out for him. Here's what I'm saying you guys, we can sway from one extreme to the other with regard to the way we think and the things we say at the drop of a hat. Be careful, you don't have to have a sinister motive to be used of the enemy, you can actually have someone's best interest at heart. Peter didn't want Jesus to suffer. But here's the deal, if you love the Lord but shun God's ways you will become a stumbling block, you won't be (here it is) *mindful* of the things of God, but the things of men.

Peter subscribed to a satanic philosophy, glory *apart* from suffering; remember the temptation in the wilderness? "You can have it all Jesus, just bow before me now, no need for all that suffering, no need for the cross." Here Peter is unwittingly saying the same thing, he didn't see the relationship between the crown, and the cross. God's way is to transform suffering *to* glory. You see, Satan promises glory but in the end leaves you suffering, God promises you suffering but in the end transforms your suffering to glory. The bible says, "*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*" Rom 8:18

Peter wasn't thinking that way, people don't think that way, we're like water we want the path of least resistance. We're mindful of the things of men, things on the earth. What's God said? "*For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways, ' says the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.*" Isa 55:8-9 Can we come to that place whereby we begin to see as God sees, think like God thinks? In Christ the answer is "Yes." "*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,*" Phil 2:5 "*Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind,*" 1 Peter 4:1 Peter couldn't connect the dot here but it's interesting to note the emphasis on suffering in his 1st epistle. and It's not that God wants us to suffer, it's that there's often times a much bigger picture than our personal comfort level. There are eternal things weighing in the balance that God is seeking to work out, time's going to slip

away from us here but again I'd encourage you to consider the emphasis the scriptures place on our minds. Being transformed by the renewing of our minds, bringing our thoughts into captivity to Christ, we're to set our minds on things above, where Christ is, the eternal perspective, to be mindful of the things of God, not of men. Men are about catering to their flesh, God is about crucifying the flesh.

Vs34-37

There's been some confusion, Jesus says, "Let Me make it real clear." and He calls the crowds to Himself and He says, "Whoever is determined to follow Me, to be My disciple, 3 things you need to do. #1 Deny yourself, #2 take up your cross, #3 follow Me." You've heard it before, salvation is free, discipleship will cost you. Jesus said, "Count the cost" we're to count the cost of following Him. All believers have some measure of love for the Lord, but not all of them have real desire to follow Him. That is be obedient to Him. What does it mean to deny yourself? The world says you have to learn to love yourself, the bible says that's the problem; we already think too highly of ourselves. We need to deny our self; that's not the same as *self denial*. Self denial is what we do when we occasional give something up for a good purpose. *Denying yourself* is saying *no* to your will, and surrendering yourself totally and completely to God's will for your life. It's sacrificing your sinful tendencies and surrendering to the work of the Spirit in your life. The bible calls it *crucifying the flesh along with it's passions and desires* (Gal 5:24). It's dying to self, living for the will and the word, the ways of God. The world would look on and say, "Your losing your life, your giving up your life." Jesus would say, "To the contrary you're finding life, gaining eternal life."

What's it mean to take up your cross? It's not saying that when you've had a bad day, or you have a physical handicap that, that's your cross to bear, that problematic person in your life. Again the cross points to sacrificing the self will, not my will, but *Yours* be done, it points to submission, whoever was under the cross wasn't about their own will I'll guarantee it, that was a person submitted to an authority over them.

and Finally "Follow Me" it's a phrase that carries with it the idea of obedience, walking in His footsteps. You see there is a point of surrender that makes for salvation.

The practice of surrender makes for sanctification. Jesus is saying, "Deny yourself, don't idolize yourself, be others oriented, submit yourself to the will of God and be obedient to the Word of God." Your cross isn't going to be the same as mine or anyone else's. Will it involve suffering, it might, it might not, it points to submission, surrender to God's will for your life.

Vs 35 is that backward mentality that's difficult for us to grasp, you've got to lose your life for Christ's sake if you want to save it, if you try and hang on to it, you'll lose. But make no mistake, to lose yourself isn't an act of desperation, it's an act of devotion.

Vs36-37

Jesus is trying to bring context/clarification to your consideration, what's your price? It's a matter of profit and loss. What will it profit you, *really, eternally* if you gain the whole world (which is passing away, temporary) and lose your soul which abides forever?

We watch those old westerns and see Indians trading precious metals, gold and silver, various treasures for a jug of whiskey. History records for us how they were just ripped off, gave everything, for virtually nothing. They didn't realize the value of what they had so they sold it off cheap. and Sometimes we think, how could someone be so naïve, so foolish. Meanwhile

people are trading their eternity for pride, a few moments of passing pleasure; they're being ripped off, giving everything for virtually nothing.

Vs38

I'll keep it brief; Jesus called people publicly. and Our recognizing Him now will mean His recognizing us then. We confess Him, He confesses us, we deny Him, He denies us, it's that simple. We'll pick up on some of this next time, but for now just realize that Jesus is seeking to make things clear, who He is, and what we need to do about it. Forget about our own wants, surrender to God's will, and be obedient to His word.

Prayer Points:

Father arm us with the mind of Christ. We thank You that You've made things clear concerning what it means to follow You, to have abundant life through losing our lives. Help us Lord to decrease, that You might increase in our lives. The flesh dies so hard, we rebel against being removed from our comfort zone, but Father may we learn to embrace Your will knowing that You are good and You think good thoughts toward us. You have our eternal best interest at heart, so help us to receive Your will, not resist it, whatever it may be. May we be bold in our witness of You, unashamed of You Jesus, we look forward to Your coming again.

All kinds of people have all kinds of opinions concerning Jesus. What's important is "Who do *you say* that I am?" Maybe it's becoming clear to you today, God has ministered to your heart and you know in your heart that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God and you're ready to believe in Him that you might have life in His name. If you're ready, you're willing to open your heart and receive Christ today, then Christ is ready to receive you, don't be ashamed of Him, confess Him today, receive life in His name, and the forgiveness of sin.