

Spiritual Progress – Mark 8:22-26

I. INTRODUCTION

A. “Only Babies”

1. A group of tourists was visiting a picturesque village.
2. As they walked along the lane, they met an elderly man sitting on a worn rock.
3. One of the tourists asked, “Where any great men born in this village?”
4. The old man replied, “Nope. Only babies.”

B. Growth Takes Time

1. Spiritual maturity is something that takes time to develop.
2. But *time alone* doesn't guarantee spiritual growth.
3. It isn't the *passage* of time itself that sees us conformed to the image of Christ.
4. It's God's Word & Spirit at work through the experiences of our lives that mold & shape us.
5. That truth comes out powerfully in this story *only* Mark records.

II. TEXT

A. V. 22

22 Then He came to Bethsaida; and they brought a blind man to Him, and begged Him to touch him.

1. Bethsaida lies on the northern shore of the Lake of Galilee in an absolutely gorgeous setting.
 - a. in Jesus' day it was lush & verdant.
 - b. we'd call it a great resort location.
 2. This blind man lived in the midst of great beauty but could not enjoy it because he couldn't see.
 3. V. 26 makes it clear he didn't live in Bethsaida, but when his friends heard that Jesus was there, they led him to Jesus & pleaded with Him that He heal him.
 4. There's a great lesson right there.
 - a. these friends of the blind man *knew* Jesus could heal him.
 - b. and though it meant a bit of work for them, they were willing to invest it if it would mean their friend would gain his sight.
 - c. so they brought their blind friend to Jesus.
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5. Jesus is *The Answer* to all men's & women's needs.
 6. But they will not come to Christ on their own, they need someone to bring them to Him. Bring them, Christian!
 - a. Jesus is the answer to your friend's troubled marriage.
 - b. He's the solution to your relative's emotional dilemma.
 7. The first & best way you can bring the lost to Jesus is by bringing Jesus to them through the testimony of your *own changed life*.
 8. You can invite them to come to church with you, or invite them to a special outreach event like a Harvest Crusade.
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9. Notice that once these friends brought the blind man to Jesus, they then *urged* Jesus to heal him.
 - a. as important as being faithful to present Jesus to the lost through our

example & witness,

- b. is the need to present the lost to Jesus in *prayer*.
10. **Pray** for your friend's salvation. Lift them up before the Lord in intercession.
- make their turning to God the object of your most fervent desire & request.
 - when you do, then you'll find your heart beating in time with God's own – for this is **His** passion, **His** desire.
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11. Did Jesus **want** to heal this blind man? [YES]
- was Jesus **able** to heal him? [YES]
 - did those who brought him believe Jesus **could** heal Him? [YES]
 - did they have reason to believe He **would** heal him? [YES]
 - the last verse of ch. 6 tells us that as many as come in contact with Jesus were made whole.
 - and yet, in spite of all this – these friends **pleaded** with Jesus to heal the blind man.
 - this begging for favor wasn't a sign of a lack of faith, as though they thought they had to talk Jesus **into** doing something He wasn't inclined to do.
 - it was evidence **of** their faith that Jesus **could & would** heal their friend.
12. Here's what they knew with absolute certainty:
- 1) Their friend was blind.
 - 2) Jesus heals all those who come to Him.
13. They put those two things together & concluded – let's get our friend to Jesus & ask Him to heal him.
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14. Our prayers for the lost will probably be a lot more earnest & fervent when we approach them with the kind of clarity these men had.
- we need to keep 2 things in mind
 - 1) The lost are doomed to the unending torment of a Christ-less eternity.
 - 2) Jesus came to save them from that fate & He is their **ONLY** hope!
 - being a good person won't excuse them, even being religious won't be enough.
 - faith in Christ is their one & only hope.
15. If anticipation of the joy & bliss of heaven isn't enough to energize our prayers for the lost, then let the prospect of the indescribable agonies of hell stoke our fervency to pray for them.

B. V. 23

23 So He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the town.

- The **reason** why Jesus left Bethsaida at this point isn't given, but we can venture a pretty good guess.
 - He intended to use this man's healing as an **object lesson** for the disciples so He left the city with its crowds so He could have some privacy with them.
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3. All 4 of the gospels make it clear there was a wild-atmosphere that characterized the crowds around Jesus at this time.
- they were **excited** by the miracles & healings He'd performed.
 - it had become something of a **show**, though Jesus had never intended it to become such.

- c. in fact, as we've seen repeatedly in Mark's gospel, when Jesus healed people, He sent them away with the command, "Be quiet & don't say anything to anyone!"
- d. He tells *this man* that in v. 26 after he'd been healed.

26 Then He sent him away to his house, saying, "Neither go into the town, nor tell anyone in the town."

- 4. This is a problem all too common when the power of God moves upon people.
 - a. the crowd of on-lookers gets all excited and starts looking for more; more *healings*, then more *dramatic* healings.
 - b. it's been interesting to watch some of the popular healing ministries today & see the *show* they make of the touch of God.
 - c. listen, God still heals! But what's presented today on so many stages as the power of God looks very different from what we see in the ministry of Jesus.
 - d. He didn't work a few miracles then form the "*Jesus Christ Healing Ministries, Inc.*"
 - e. when He healed the needy, He told them to be quiet, & to return to their homes and families & to live the rest of their lives in light of their new-found faith in Him.

- 5. Jesus took this man outside the hubbub of Bethsaida because He intended to use his healing as an *important object lesson* for the disciples & He didn't want them distracted by the clamor of the crowds for more miracles.
- 6. What that lesson was becomes clear as we read further. V. 23 goes on . . .

And when He had spit on his eyes and put His hands on him, He asked him if he saw anything.
- 7. Okay, this seems just plain bizarre & a bit disgusting. What is going on here?
- 8. Spittle was believed by the people of the ancient world to hold healing properties.
 - a. it's not hard to understand why they would think this.
 - b. if you get a cut on your finger, what's the first thing most people do almost instinctually? They put it in their mouth. [ex: paper cut]
- 9. When Jesus spit in this man's eyes, He *wasn't insulting* Him, He was employing a form of medicine for that time.
- 10. Of course Jesus knew there was nothing in the spittle which had medicinal value. He was simply putting His seal of approval on the *use* of medicine in the treatment of illness & disease.
- 11. God has ordained & designed 3 means by which our bodies can be healed.
 - 1) First is the body's own, natural, built-in healing mechanisms.
 - a) when you cut you finger, immediately the tissue around the cut engorges with blood and the cells go to work fighting infection at the same time they begin to build structures that repair the wound.
 - b) the scab that forms is like a little triage tent the body puts up over the wound to heal the breach into the body.
 - 2) Second is the discovery and use of medicine which really only *assist & supplement* the body's healing mechanisms.
 - a) while it might be tempting to attribute the discovery of medicine to

science & the ingenuity of man,

b) we know it was God who designed & created man's brain & placed within him an insatiable hunger for exploration & discovery.

3) Third is the intervention of God in affecting a miracle of healing.

12. For this man's recovery, Jesus used both 2 & 3; medicine & divine healing.

13. It's interesting to note that the man's healing through the use of the spit wasn't complete.

14. Jesus asked the man to describe what he saw . . .

D. Vs. 24-25

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

25 Then He put His hands on his eyes again and made him look up. And he was restored and saw everyone clearly.

1. This is the only healing we're told Jesus performed that wasn't instantaneous.

2. It seems this man had had his sight at one time because he was familiar with what trees looked like.

3. After Jesus' *first* touch, his vision was blurry & indistinct so that people were only discernable as slender upright forms, much like a tree.

4. The only difference was that he perceived motion & knew they couldn't be trees.

5. Jesus then touched Him again, no spit this time, & when the man looked, his sight was made whole; he could now see Jesus & the disciples clearly.

6. Jesus then sent the man home.

E. The Lesson

1. What *lesson* was Jesus teaching through this miracle?

2. The progression of this man's healing was *not* due to the fact that this was an especially *hard one* so Jesus had to do it twice!

3. He'd done much more dramatic things with less apparent effort before this.

a. walking on the water, feeding the thousands with a sack lunch

b. calming the storm, raising a 12 year old girl from the dead.

c. & delivering a man possessed by a whole legion of demons.

d. all of these were *far more dramatic* in their demonstration of the power of God than healing some guy who'd become blind.

4. So what's going on here?

5. Where Mark places this story gives us the answer.

a. twice now Jesus has feed thousands with just a meager supply of bread and meat.

b. yet despite the *obvious demonstration* of His power, the disciples are still in doubt over just who He is.

c. right after this, Jesus asks them Who they think He is. Peter rises to the occasion & declares He is the Messiah and Son of God!

d. then, in the very next moment, as Jesus begins to tell the disciples He must go to Jerusalem where He will suffer & die, Peter rebukes Him for such a negative confession!

e. how can Peter call Jesus the Messiah one moment, then turn right around and rebuke Him for revealing the Messiah's mission?

6. The problem is this – the disciples, all of them, were just like this blind man Jesus healed.
 - a. they'd been blind, but at this moment, their spiritual sight had been **awakened**.
 - b. the problem is, it wasn't **wholly restored**.
 - c. just as the blind man mistook people for trees, they mistook Jesus for something other than Who he was.
 - d. the day would soon come when He would touch them again, & their spiritual sight & discernment would be made clear.
 - e. that day came on Resurrection Sunday when Jesus breathed on them & they were born again.
 - f. as Luke says it in 24:45, He "**opened their understanding**" to the reality of Who He really was.
7. At this point in Mark's gospel, the disciples were blind to the **full reality of Who Jesus was** because of their own ideas about what the Messiah **would be like**. They could only see Jesus through the lens of their **expectations**.
8. The story's told of Cary Grant walking down a street one day when a man locked eyes on him with excitement.
 - a. the man said, "Wait a minute, you're . . . you're—I know who you are. Don't tell me, you're uh, Rock Hud . . . no, you're . . ."
 - b. the movie star decided to help the guy out & said, "Cary Grant."
 - c. the man said, "No, that's not it. You're . . ."
 - d. there was Cary Grant, identifying himself with his own name, but the man had someone else in mind and wouldn't accept his word.
9. Jesus knew the struggle the disciples were having with figuring out Who He was, and used this man's healing as an object lesson to teach them that while their views & opinions of Him were blurry & uncertain, the day would come when they would see clearly.
10. Instead of sending them home with the command to be quiet, He would send them into the whole world to shout it from the housetops.

III. CONCLUSION

A. The Lesson for Us

1. The lesson **you & I** can glean from this story is that spiritual growth is a **process**.
 2. All **true** spiritual growth is based in the **knowledge** of God.
 3. And His revelation is an **unending process of deepening intimacy**.
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4. When Lynn & I met, I was attracted to her both because of her obvious physical beauty & because of the inner beauty of her love for Jesus.
 - a. in my estimation, her "babeosity" was **total**, both on the inside & outside.
 - b. as we began our friendship & I got to know her better, my attraction to her **increased** because I had a chance to discover her values & priorities. I admired her determination to be holy & follow Jesus.
 - c. over the last 25 years, my knowledge of Lynn has grown deeper still.
 - d. and because of that I can say the love I have for her is more solid, more meaningful, & more **effectual** than it was when I first asked her to marry me.

- e. my relationship with Lynn, based on my intimate knowledge of her, has been the cause of some huge changes *in my life*.
 - f. but it's taken the backdrop of the last quarter century for those changes to occur.
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5. The same is true of our relationship with God & how it impacts our lives.
 - a. it's only as we grow in our knowledge of ***Who God is*** that we understand ***who we are***.
 - b. and in His mercy, God only imparts His revelation to us as His grace prepares & equips us ***to receive it***.
 - c. I can honestly say after nearly 30 years of walking with the Lord that if God had shown me in the first hour of my Christian life, everything I know today about Him & what it means to be His, I would have probably blown up!
 6. Spiritual growth is a process that unfolds with the passage of time.
 7. But let me say this, please don't think that time alone is what makes change.
 8. God, not time, makes saints. It's just that God works in & through time to make them.
 9. The crucial issue for us to grasp today is that just as this man found his sight restored by the touch of Jesus, that's where we'll find our spiritual sight made clear – at the touch of the Lord.
 10. If you would press on & grow in grace, spend time with the Lord.
 - a. note the progression in this story: people brought this man to Jesus.
 - b. then Jesus then took him by the hand outside the city to a private, quiet place.
 - c. then He touched him, & again; -- then his sight was clear.
 11. Christian, you've already been brought to Christ.
 - a. and He's faithfully led you by the hand into faith in Him.
 - b. now it's time to pursue His touch, not of these eyes, but the eyes of your heart.
 - c. the key to your growth in life is the touch of Jesus.
 - d. listen to the Apostle Paul's most fervent prayer for Christians – [Eph. 1:16-23]

16[I] do not cease to . . . make mention of you in my prayers: 17that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, 18the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know

- e. then listen to this list of what he wanted them to know -
 - **what is the hope of His calling,**
 - **what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,**
 - **19and what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power**
- f. he describes that power that's ours in Christ . . .
 - **20which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the**

dead

- and seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places*,
- ²¹far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.
- ²²And He put all *things* under His feet,
- and gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church,
- ²³which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

g. that's us! The Church, His Body, His fullness!

12. I must confess that when I read Paul's words here & compare *my* spiritual awareness to it, I realize that I'm much like the man who saw people as trees!
13. But I want to see clearly! I want to know as I am known.
14. "Jesus, Open the eyes of my heart – let me see You as You truly are.
15. Then let me see myself, not as I am, but as *You* see me."

B. Let God Work

1. There's one last thing for us to take away from this story.
2. When the man said he saw people like trees, the disciples didn't guffaw or criticize him for his lack of faith or less than perfect healing.
3. They left the matter in Jesus' hands & waited to see what He would do.
4. Healing in this man's case was a *progressive* thing.
5. As a picture of spiritual growth, it teaches us we need to be gracious in dealing with others when they don't seem to be maturing on a time-table more to our liking.
6. It's not uncommon for believers who've walked with the Lord for many years to become *impatient* with young believers who don't possess the same commitment to holiness they do.
 - a. they forget that when they were young believers their view of holiness was fuzzy.
 - b. their victory over the obvious sins of the flesh is a struggle long forgotten.
 - c. and they grow impatient & judgmental with those new to the faith who are struggling & stumbling.
7. Christians who's background has seen less involvement in the things of the world can become *frustrated* with new Christians who've just recently left a life of grave worldliness and who are a bit slow to lay aside the habits of their past.
 - a. these might be patterns of dress, of speech, of behavior.
 - b. and this frustration can express itself in a kind of subtle legalism that wants to start enforcing rules.
8. We need to remember that we all grow at a different pace.
 - a. some are quick to change,
 - b. others have a greater struggle with sin & take longer to learn the lessons of grace.
9. Even in the parable of the sower, Jesus said that some would bear fruit at a 30-fold rate, while others produced 60-fold, & still others 100-fold.
10. His criteria was simply growth & fruit, its *abundance* was a secondary matter.

11. As we all grow in Christ together, some of us will mature quickly while others lag behind.
12. The important thing – what we need to look for is ***growth, spiritual fruit,***
13. Not it's abundance, but it's presence.