

The Process of Discipleship

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[0 : 0 0] You may be seated. Good morning. My name's Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today.

A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community.

And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced there's no one so good. They don't need God's grace. And no one's so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in His Word, because we believe He has something to say to everyone.

We're continuing our series in the Gospel of Mark. You'll remember that the Gospels tell the story of Jesus in His life and His death and His resurrection. And over the last few weeks, we've been looking at this theme or topic of faith, what it looks like to have faith versus unbelief.

And this morning, in a sense, we're continuing that theme as this passage presents to us the question of how God changes us to make us look more and more like Jesus.

[1 : 1 1] Maybe you're frustrated with growth in your life. You feel like you should know more and do more and be more, and you wonder why it's so slow and hard.

Maybe you're satisfied, and you don't think there's much that needs to be changed. Maybe there's a little bit of polishing that needs to happen, but for the most part, you consider yourself to be a finished product, even though you might not say it out loud.

Either way, this passage speaks to our desire and confusion and frustration with change as Jesus performs another healing. And so I'm going to invite you to turn with me now to Mark 8, starting at verse 22.

You can turn in your worship guide. You can turn on your phone. You can turn in your Bible. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's Word. And God tells us that His Word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold, and it's sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb.

And so that's why we read now Mark 8, starting at verse 22. And they came to Bethsaida, and some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him.

[2 : 3 0] And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village. And when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, Do you see anything?

Verse 24. And he looked up and said, I see people, but they look like trees walking. Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again, and he opened his eyes.

His sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. And he sent him to his home, saying, Do not even enter the village. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's Word.

Our Father in Heaven, we thank you again that you are the ultimate example of a good father. Father, you're the reason we know what a good father looks like, and you're the reason we hurt when we see some fall short.

We thank you that like a good father, you speak to us. You explain things to us. You help us understand. You coach us and direct us and guide us and correct us. We ask that you would do that this morning by your Word, that you would open it up to us.

[3 : 45] You would clear our minds. You'd soften our hearts, that you would speak to us in words that are simple enough for us to understand, that we would see and believe everything that's written about you and your Word.

Most of all, we ask that you would help us to see Jesus, and as we see him, you would change us. We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. So, right about now, I'm hitting my three-year anniversary of being a homeowner.

Technically, that happened in May, but I didn't move in until the very end of June, so I'm coming up on that point, and it's actually going to be a record for me because I've never lived anywhere longer than three years in specific residence as an adult, so I'm looking to break that next month, coming up very quickly.

And as you may know, if you're a homeowner, I've become very familiar with Home Depot. And there's one aisle on Home Depot that I'm pretty convinced I've spent more time on than any other aisle, and that's where all the light bulbs are.

Because, of course, I have the challenge over three years. Many lights go out, and so I have to show up to Home Depot taking with me the old, burnt-out light, trying to read the labels on whatever it is that I'm replacing, figuring out what's the highest wattage that I can go to.

[5 : 10] Do I want soft white or daylight? Which I don't even know what that means, so I just guess. But there's also the different types of light bulbs that I have to choose between.

There's various lights in my house that are three-way lights, so I have to make sure I have the right type or things will go wrong. There's other lights where it doesn't matter. It's either on or off. And then I have the—I haven't had many of these. I think I've had one, the dimmer light.

And it turns out you have to spy a special bulb for that. You can't just throw anything in. If you do, I believe you'll hear kind of a staticky sound. Don't ask me how I know that. There are two kinds of lights in a sense.

There's the on-off. Once, they're either one way or the other. And there's the dimmer. They exist in degrees. And that's actually true for many things in our lives. There are things that are only on and off.

So you are either an American citizen or you're not. You are either married or you're not. You are either a legal adult or a minor. Either you have a degree or you don't.

[6 : 15] Either you graduated or you didn't. Either you're a Christian or you're not. Either you're baptized or you are unbaptized. These are things that don't exist in degrees. You cannot be half married.

You cannot be sort of an American citizen. There are other things in this life that exist in degrees. So once you're married, you can grow in understanding and knowing and loving your spouse.

That's something that can change over time. Maybe you can be half retired. You've given up full-time work, but you have a part-time job now. I've learned since being in a military community that you can have percentages assigned to your disability.

Maybe you're only 30% disabled. Maybe you're 80% disabled. Same thing can happen with ethnicity. I have an Italian name, which I'm sure you could guess by my dark complexion.

But I'm actually only an eighth Italian. And unless I do what my uncle did and marry an Italian, that's only going to get diluted over time. In other words, there are stages to growth and understanding.

- [7 : 24] That's going to help us understand the problem that we come up against the challenge in this passage, which is, why does Jesus' healing not work the first time? Jesus has two stages as he addresses this man.

Stage 1, verses 23 and 24. Jesus takes this blind man aside and he asks him, Do you see anything?

And it turns out the healing sort of worked. Verse 24, I see people, but they look like trees, walking. So Jesus has to come back a second time because the first treatment apparently wasn't effective enough and touch this man's eyes again.

Why is it that Jesus does not heal this man's eyes fully once and for all in one stage with one touch? Is it because Jesus lacks power? Is it because Jesus is new to this kind of treatment?

You know, he's experienced with casting out demons. He's just not experienced with the spittle thing. You notice in the second time he does it, he doesn't spit. So maybe it was the spittle that got in the way.

- [8 : 35] Do you think that's the problem with what Jesus is doing here? Maybe it's lack of experience, lack of power. No. No. In Mark chapter 5, Jesus raised Jairus' daughter from the dead.

This is so much easier and simpler than bringing someone who is dead and making them alive again. The problem is not that Jesus is not powerful enough or experienced enough.

Jesus in this passage is using a physical healing to teach us a spiritual lesson. Jesus is using a physical healing to teach a spiritual lesson.

Now, you might wonder if I'm just spiritualizing this passage because that makes it easy to preach. And the answer is no. We know based on the broader context of this section that this is what Jesus is doing.

Remember, we've seen this theme of seeing over and over again. Jesus himself spiritualizes the idea of seeing in chapter 8, verse 18.

- [9 : 37] This was last week. He said, Having eyes do you not see and having ears do you not hear? Jesus was not asking the disciples if they needed to get glasses.

He was asking them about their spiritual understanding. And remember, they were blinded in a sense. They had seen Jesus feed the 5,000.

They had seen him feed the 4,000. And they were still worried about whether they would have enough to eat. Jesus is saying, Can't you see metaphorically the things that are right in front of you?

And now he gives us this healing to help us understand what it looks like for God to change us, to give us sight in this life. It is not a coincidence that this passage comes immediately after the story where Jesus asks about their sight.

What he is telling them, what he is doing is giving them a lesson that when it comes to spiritual sight, when it comes to understanding God and his character, when it comes to growing in our trust and love and affection for him, it is a dimmer switch, not an on and off switch.

- [10 : 57] It's a dimmer switch, not an on and off switch. We're going to have another example next week of this same problem. Peter is going to confess Christ as the Messiah.

And then he's going to rebuke Jesus for talking about suffering. It's a dimmer switch, not an on and off switch. Then Jesus comes as this model of humility, right?

And in chapter nine, Jesus has been serving them this whole time and they start having an argument about who is going to be the greatest. They see and they don't see.

Jesus tells them, chapter nine, if anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all. And then because they took that lesson to heart and internalized it, in chapter 10, James and John request to sit at Jesus' left and his right hand in the kingdom.

That was a joke. They don't internalize it. They don't understand it. They don't get it. Jesus has told them about humility and in the next chapter, they're showing off their pride.

[12 : 05] The disciples see Jesus and they don't see Jesus. They know Jesus and they don't know him. They sort of get it and they also sort of do not get it. Their vision is distorted.

We might say they see people, but they look like trees walking. They are growing slowly in their understanding.

The lesson is that true sight of Jesus comes slowly and progressively. True sight of Jesus comes slowly and progressively.

Chapter eight, they don't understand that Jesus has come to suffer. That appears to be a surprise for them. Chapter 10, Jesus has to help them understand that he has come not to be served, but to serve.

They don't understand that Jesus has not come with an earthly political vision. They don't understand that he hasn't come for power and influence right now. Seeing Jesus, spiritual understanding, knowing God comes gradually, incompletely.

[13 : 20] We're often confused. We are like this man who experiences this healing. We see in part, but not in full.

We see outlines, but not details. Our vision and our sight is not what we want. The same thing is true for us.

We see Jesus, but we don't see him. Maybe you see Jesus as king, but it's all about politics in the here and now.

Maybe it's not about primarily worshiping and obeying and loving God, but instead it's been shrunk to these very specific public policy agendas and political candidates.

That for you is the sum total of what it means for Jesus to be king. Maybe Jesus as provider, and he is, but you've forgotten that he blesses for us to be a blessing, that what he told Abraham is still true, that we're meant to spread God's love and goodness throughout the world.

[14 : 27] Maybe you know that Jesus calls you, but deep down you think that Jesus has called you to more and greater power and influence.

But Jesus tells us that he's called us to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him. We see him, but we don't see him.

Without God's intervention, we do not naturally understand the upside down, counterintuitive nature of Jesus and his purposes and his mission and his kingdom.

We know the right words, but we sing the wrong tune. We know the right words, but we sing the right tune, sing the wrong tune.

Many people think that Christianity is sort of like going under LASIK surgery. You go, you find an eye doctor, they perform this operation on you, maybe there's a little bit of waiting time, but then you need no glasses.

[15 : 37] Everything is as if your vision was perfect. And so you become a Christian and some people teach this. You expect to have this just radical transformation in every area of your life.

You no longer struggle with sin. Things that were addictions for you and habits that pulled you down suddenly lose all power in your life. Now don't hear what I'm not saying.

There are times when God does bring true, radical, deep transformation into people's lives. And that is not the normative expectation of the Christian life.

Sanctification, growing in holiness, is a slow, long-term, lifelong process. It is not LASIK surgery.

Becoming a Christian, following Jesus, is a long and slow recovery and rehabilitation. It is growing in our vision and our sight year by year, day by day, month by month.

[16 : 47] It is understanding more and more over a long period of time. Now there's a couple ways to take this passage.

Some people take this as a rebuke from Jesus to the disciples. He asked them in verse 18, can't you see yet? And now he gives them this picture of someone who sees but doesn't see.

Now we could take it in that way. That's legitimate. I don't know if I'd put it as a rebuke as much as a description and an explanation. You don't know as much as you think you do.

You see people, but they look like trees. You have still so far to go. There's also another way to take this which is as a word of encouragement.

The disciples are stumbling along. They don't see as much as they should. They don't understand as much as they need to.

[17 : 51] Like us, they're still figuring it out. Like us, they're still going through a process. Like us, there are things that they wish that they knew and understand and believed and practiced more and more.

Jesus does not give up on them. Jesus has not given up on us. Our sight is imperfect.

Our hope is not in that but the one who heals it. Our sight is imperfect. Our hope is not in that but in the one who heals it.

there's a realistic expectation here for discipleship. There's an encouragement that even if your understanding is foggy, Jesus still pursues and knows and loves and transforms you.

Jesus is still at work. I've told you many times throughout Mark the words of one of my professors which is this, the disciples got almost everything wrong and they got one thing right.

[19 : 06] They kept following Jesus. The disciples' sight is foggy and unclear and mistaken and they're with Jesus.

that reminds us that the news of a slow and long recovery is discouraging unless there's hope for healing.

The news of a slow and long recovery is discouraging unless there's a hope for healing. Thankfully this passage points out not only the fact that our vision is incomplete that we don't understand what we need to but it also shows us Jesus here as the great healer.

Look with me verse 23. This man has been brought by his friends and what does Jesus do? Similar to the previous healing he takes this man by the hand.

It's a Bible trivia for you. When is the one time when Jesus starts holding hands with another man? This is it. Jesus takes him by the hand by the way this is common practice in the Middle East and leads him away tenderly, gently, personally.

[20 : 22] Just like in the previous healing, Jesus takes him to a private place. He's not putting on a show for other people to see how great and how powerful he is.

He has this spitting and touching ritual which is similar to what we saw with the man who is mute and deaf. He is speaking to this man in a way that he can understand.

He's communicating in this cultural form that will help this man know what it is that Jesus is doing. He meets this man as an individual in real time, in real space, touching him, caring about him, and meeting him there to bring him healing in his sight.

Brothers and sisters, we need miraculous healing and intervention to be able to understand anything of spiritual value in this life.

And Jesus comes personally and specifically and individually just like he did before. Jesus comes to you specifically, individually, clearly, personally.

[21 : 40] You may have noticed on page six, excuse me, page seven of your worship guide. I have this quote for you on the left.

Because situations and persons come unscripted, fluid, and unpredictable, Jesus engages each person and situation in a personalized way. It is no truism to say that Jesus really does meet you where you are, always.

Scripture does the same. No boilerplate, the Holy Spirit makes words personal. Jesus comes and meets you one-on-one and gives you sight in the same way that he did for this man.

Jesus has not given up on you in the midst of your confusion and mistakes and stumbling around. Jesus has not abandoned you because you can't see everything as correctly as you should.

Instead, Jesus comes as he did as a man on this earth and he meets you in the midst of your sin and confusion and despair and he touches you like he touched this man.

[22 : 54] Romans chapter 5 verse 8 tells us that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. He didn't wait until we had figured everything out and fixed ourselves before he showed up on this earth.

He didn't wait until you had figured everything out and fixed yourself before he showed up in your life. How is it that we change? God changes us slowly, gradually, progressively and he changes us by Jesus' personal touch in our lives.

Change is a result of a personal relationship with Jesus. Change is a result of God's intimate and personal work in your life.

As you live your life, Jesus is touching your eyes with circumstances, with disappointments, with joys, with sufferings.

That's one question you can ask as you encounter everything that God presents in your way this week. how is this helping my sight? How is God using this to help me see clearly little by little, step by step?

[24 : 18] Jesus asks, and we'll close with this, this important question in verse 23, the very end, do you see anything? do you see anything?

That's the question for us from this passage this morning. Do you see anything? The answer is yes and no. We see, but we don't see.

We know, but we don't know. Like the disciples, incomplete, flawed, confused. Jesus, healing, restoring, growing us throughout our lives.

we have hope because Jesus heals. That's how we respond to him. Who is Jesus? He is the one who comes and changes little by little over time.

And so we keep following him. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you for the encouragement of this passage.

[25 : 23] That no matter our mistakes, our failures, our misunderstandings, you come and you meet us where we are in our lives. You arrange events and circumstances and people to give us the sight and understanding that we need.

We ask that you would do that this week, that you would grow our knowledge of you, that we would see Jesus clearly more and more. We would live in light of you and your love for us.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.