

## God's Servant Clarifies

### Mark 8:22-38

This week a man in our church shared the story of waking up early one morning and hearing his wife exclaim, ***"The neighbor's house is on fire!!"*** The man quickly ran out to help the woman who lived in the house. She was still asleep and not aware of the problem. Some others had already been pounding on the door to waken her. One neighbor talked about the need to break the door down to rescue her.

Just before they smashed their way into the house, the woman opened the door. Of all the people on her porch at that early hour, she was most familiar with this neighbor from our church family. So she followed him out of the house. He explained the problem and as led her away from the fire toward safety. She had not made it out of her front yard when she stopped and said, *"I need to run back into my house to get a few things."* My friend said, "OK. I will go with you." NO!! He did not say that. He said, "You must do that!"

My friend successfully convinced this woman to NOT go back in to her burning house.

Happily, the fire was put out and most of the house was preserved.

Question: Why would someone be tempted to run back into a burning house? A number of factors contribute to this decision:

--**False confidence in navigating the danger.** We think that we will avoid more loss.

--**Undervaluing the thing we put at risk.** In that moment, we do not place enough value on our physical life.

--**Overestimating the value of the things in the house.** Our emotions convince us that the possessions we might save have a very high value. In reality every possession has very little impact on the joy of our lives or the lives of others.

Before we criticize this dear woman for wanting to go back into the house to gather a few things, keep in mind that we all are tempted to take a far more dangerous risk. Jesus speaks to us in Mark 8 about the foolishness that we often entertain when He says,

*For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul?" (Mark 8:35-37 [ESV](#))*

God gives us our soul at our conception in our mother's womb. Though invisible, our soul is eternally valuable. Though we cannot see it or hear it or feel it, our soul determines every other important matter in our life. Our soul determines whether we see God or remain blind to Him. Our soul determines whether our bodies resurrect to eternal glory or whether our bodies resurrect to eternal shame. Our soul determines whether we are filled with light or filled with darkness. Our soul determines whether we are sons of God or servants of Satan. Our soul determines whether we are slaves to sin or free in Christ.

Gaining every treasure that this world contains cannot make up for the incalculable loss of our soul.

**Question:** Do you feel that to be true? When you hear Jesus speak that into your life, does it ring true for you? Or does your soul seem to be a small and unimportant thing? Is the condition of your soul a matter of little concern to you?

When we are born in this world, our eternal soul is born in great distress. God describes our soul as being dead in sins. God's Word tells that our soul is blind to God and that it continually lusts after worldly passions. We need a miracle for our soul to be rescued from these enslaving passions, from our blindness to God, from the eternal trouble that awaits us on that last day.

In love, God sent His Son to rescue our soul from His wrath and to place His life in us through the miracle of new birth. This is the Gospel! God does what we cannot. He takes our dead soul and pours His life into all who believe in His Son.

**Question:** How can I protect my soul from forfeiting my soul with sin? How can my soul go from strength to strength in glory?

**Main Idea:** Jesus labors to makes us disciples who love God with all our soul. He works to rescue our soul from ruin. He labors to strengthen soul so that we win the battle against sin and Satan.

**Jesus helps us to walk the path of discipleship through . . .**

**1. His progressive work. (8:22-26)**

Jesus now leads His disciples away from Gentile country to a town on the far northside of the Sea of Galilee. Bethsaida is Peter, Andrew and Philip's hometown. This has become a retreat center for Jesus where He can rest from the intensity of His labors.

While there some people bring a blind man to Jesus. The friends of this blind man beg Jesus to simply touch him. They believe that their friend will be given sight if only Jesus would take a moment for him. Jesus looks around at all the people who are gathering in the center of town. He reaches down and takes this man by the hand. He says, "I will help you, but not here in the middle of the crowds. Let us go to a quiet place." Jesus then walks hand in hand with the man, leading him out of the village. As they walk together, Jesus is quiet and the man is wondering where Jesus is taking him. Jesus stops in a very remote place.

Normally, Jesus does His miracles in public as a witness to His divine Person, but here He intentionally leads this man away from the public eye to help this man. He does not want this miracle to become a spark that ignites crowds of people out to Him. He wants this to be a very personal encounter between Him and this man.

Jesus then spits in his own hands and rubs His spit on the man's blind eyes. Jesus asks him, "Do you see anything?" Keep in mind that Jesus never asks questions because He needs information. Jesus knows exactly what is happening to this man. But Jesus asks the question to stimulate faith in this discouraged man.

The man smiles with apprehension and replies, *"I see people. But they are very fuzzy. They look like trees walking about. I cannot make out any distinction between them."* He is trembling with anticipation. Before Jesus touched his eyes, he saw absolutely nothing. All was darkness to him. Now light is pouring in and he is experiencing vision of the world in which he lives. The blurriness of this moment on the one hand thrills him, BUT on the other hand, this new light makes him yearn to see MORE!!

Jesus then takes His hands and He places them a second time on the man's eyes. The man now opens his eyes and he shouts with joy! "I can see! I can see!" He has 20/20 vision. He sees faces. He sees clothes. He sees his friends who are looking at him in wonder! He sees the blue sky. He sees the desert birds and plants. He sees Jesus smiling upon him with love. He sees EVERYTHING!

Jesus then says, *“Do not go back into the village. Go home to your house outside of Bethsaida. If you go into the village, there will be a crowd clamoring for Me. I want this to be between us for now.”*

Question: Why did Jesus do this miracle gradually? Why did the first touch not heal the man wholly?

I believe that every miracle is a witness to Jesus' divine Person. Jesus is who He claims to be . . . both Lord and Messiah/King. He possesses authority over everything . . . even death and disease.

I also believe that Jesus' miracles teach us spiritual truths about what Jesus does for our soul. **Here, Jesus' miracle reminds us that He opens the eyes of our heart.** We are blind to God and to His glory, but Jesus touches us and we see God. We see that He is real and that He is holy, good, righteous, loving, wise, sovereign, merciful and all powerful. **Jesus makes it possible for us to not only know ABOUT God, but to actually know Him . . . to experience Him . . . to see Him for the great God that He is.**

Paul describes this miracle this way:

*“For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 4:6 [ESV](#))*

**Truth: Conversion is an explosion of light in our soul. Conversion brings a radical change from darkness to light, from blindness to seeing the God of glory.**

**So why does Jesus do this miracle gradually?** I believe Jesus is showing us that He works in our spirit gradually . . . progressively. The work of God's Spirit in helping us to see God is a miracle at once . . . and yet we do not see Him with 20/20 clarity. **We are very much like this man whom Jesus touches . . . when Jesus touches our life, we see, but we see imperfectly.**

**This growing clarity of our vision of God is part of our growth as disciples of Jesus.** We only see in part in this present world. We will one day see fully as we stand before Him. But for now, we see through a glass dimly.

Paul says it this way,

*“For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.” (1 Corinthians 13:12 [ESV](#))*

**Jesus is presently doing a work in us to make our vision of God more and more and more clear.** He will complete this vision at a future day, but His work in us is an exciting adventure. He offers to give us greater and greater clarity to see Him in His glory and wonder.

This yearning for more of Jesus' work to fully restore our spiritual sight is the motivation behind the great hymn, "Be Thou My Vision". When we sing this hymn, we are asking Jesus to deepen the miracle that He has begun in us:

*Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;  
Naught be all else to me save that thou art.  
Thou my best thought by day and by night;  
Waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.*

*High King of Heaven, my victory won,  
May I reach Heaven's joys, O bright Heav'n's Sun!  
Heart of my heart, whatever befall,  
Still be my vision, O Ruler of all.*

This growth in our soul's vision keeps us from quitting when the path of discipleship is hard. We know that Jesus is progressively working in us to see more and more of God. He will not leave us in a state of partial vision, but is working even now to move us from faith to faith.

*So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."*  
(2 Corinthians 4:16-18 [ESV](#))

By the Spirit of God, greater and greater clarity of vision is available to us with every passing day!! What an adventure the Christian life is! **As long as we live, Jesus works to give us greater and greater vision of God.**

**Truth: Our soul feeds upon a progressively growing vision of God.**

Jesus helps us to walk the path of discipleship through . . .

### 1. His progressive work. (8:22-26)

## 2. His powerful reign. (8:27-30)

*And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets."*

**Truth: Many who hear Jesus' words are favorable to Him. But being favorable to Jesus is very different from believing in Him.**

Eternal life does not come to those who have a good opinion of Jesus. Eternal life comes to those who confess Him as Lord.

Jesus now drives this personal point home to His disciples:

*And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ." And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him." (Mark 8:27-30 [ESV](#))*

Jesus works with His disciples to bring this important decision to a crisis point regarding His Person. The question is not so much a theological one as it is a personal one. Jesus is not asking the question the way a seminary professor would ask students on an essay test. Jesus is asking the question the way a king would ask subjects whom He has conquered. ***"Who do you say that I am? Do you acknowledge Me as the rightful ruler over you? Do you give me allegiance or do you still bow your life to another king?"***

**When Jesus asks the question about His identity as King, the answer can no longer be generalized.** It is sort of like the question, "Will you marry me?" Once that question is asked, the person who is being asked cannot avoid an very defining answer. To say nothing . . . is an answer. To say something general . . . is an answer. To change the subject . . . is an answer. To say, "Let's talk about that later . . . is an answer."

We cannot hear Jesus ask this question and be fuzzy or faltering about it. We either say, "You are the Messiah." Or we say something else. But the question demands an answer that will define our commitment to Him. "Who do you say that I am?"

**Jesus still today brings this question to those who say that they are His disciples.** Jesus does not bring this question to us to embarrass us or to put us on

the spot. Jesus brings this question to us to help us make progress as disciples. He asks the question out of love for us.

**Jesus sometimes brings this question sometimes through a sermon.** We arrive on a Sunday morning with really no thoughts of making a great spiritual commitment, but then God speaks to us. We know that we will either leave a service bowed in renewed submission to Him as Lord or we will leave unbowed to Him in our hearts.

**He sometimes brings this question through a severe trial.** We have a health report or lose a job or suffer the death of a loved one. Jesus asks, "Who do you say that I am?" We either bow our knees and move forward in our worship of Him as Messiah OR we become more dull to His reign over us.

**Truth: Jesus still calls us to answer the question. "Who do you say I am?" We cannot grow as disciples without a clear verbal confession that Jesus is the Messiah/King.**

I love Peter's response here! Matthew records . . .

*"Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'"* (Matthew 16:16 [ESV](#))

What a simple and clear confession! Now Peter has a long way to go on the path of discipleship. He still falters and flails under pressure. But here at a time when many are against Jesus, many oppose Him, many reject Him . . . here Peter confesses Jesus as Messiah before his peers.

Yes. Words without heart carry no value. But a heart that confesses Christ needs a mouth to give expression to Him. **Such verbal confession is necessary if we are disciples of Jesus. Have you made it?** I urge you not to keep quiet about your confession of Jesus as Messiah . . . as Lord over your life. Confess this first to Jesus. But then confess it to your family and your friends.

**Question: How long has it been since you told someone, "Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus in my King and my God."?** Our confession does not need to be filled with elaborate and scholarly terms. The simple, sincere confession of Jesus will

*"And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.'"* (Matthew 16:17 [ESV](#))

Jesus is the One whom God sent to rule and reign over us and over the whole of the world. He is the One we choose to obey. He is the One we believe offers life. If you confess that to be true, it is because God revealed it to you. If you do not confess it to be true, ask the Father to make it clear.

**Truth: Our soul needs to confess Jesus as our King. Without such confession, our soul will be lost forever.**

**Jesus helps us to walk the path of discipleship through . . .**

- 1. His progressive work. (8:22-26)**
- 2. His powerful reign. (8:27-30)**
- 3. His atoning death. (8:31-33)**

*And he began to teach them that 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. And he said this plainly.” (Mark 8:31-32 [ESV](#))*

The disciple’s heads are left spinning by this teaching. Jesus has just commended Peter for declaring that He is the Messiah. Remember that the OT prophesied that the Messiah would rule and reign over Israel and indeed over the whole world. A reasonable assumption is that Jesus has the power to defeat those who oppose Him.

So the disciples are baffled by Jesus’ prophecy that He will be rejected and killed by the elders and chief priests. **The disciples are so excited about the glory of the Messiah’s reign that the suffering of the Messiah seems unthinkable to them.**

**Yet Jesus knows that His disciples must rejoice in His death or we will not mature as disciples. This announcement of His death does not damage our soul, but nourishes our soul.**

**Truth: The death of Jesus is not a DEFEAT of His divine authority and power, the death of Jesus is a DISPLAY of His divine authority and power.**

Jesus tells us plainly, “The Son of Man MUST suffer and . . . be killed.” Not WILL, but MUST. Why MUST He die?



The center truth of the Bible is found in the answer to this question. This is the foundation stone of everything else God teaches about Himself and about His plan to rescue His people from sin.

Jesus **MUST** die in order to cancel the debt of our sin . . . in order to offer forgiveness of sin to us . . . in order to invite us into His kingdom.

**“without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.” (Hebrews 9:22 [ESV](#))**

Through Jesus’ death, we have hope of a new kingdom . . . hope of a restored relationship with God . . . hope of being rescued from God’s wrath.

Jesus knows that His disciples constantly need to be brought to the foot of the cross. And so He leads to back there over and over and over. We never get to a point where we no longer need to remember the atoning death of Jesus.

Illustration: The Lord’s Supper.

Peter had trouble with this prophecy of Jesus.

*And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”” (Mark 8:32-33 [ESV](#))*

Satan wants to push us away from the cross. He knows that when Jesus’ followers place themselves under the cross of Christ, we are humbled by our need and we are energized by His gift. Satan would have us think about ANYTHING other than the cross of Jesus . . . politics, the economy, ethics, temporal priorities, successes, failures, disagreements, frustrations, worries. Oh how Satan fills our minds with so many subjects! But Jesus keeps leading us back to His cross.

**Truth: Without the cross, our soul is crushed by the guilt and shame of our sin. Our soul is weakened by the fear of future punishment. Our soul is weighed down under our failures. At the cross, at the cross the burden of our sin rolls away from us and we are free.**

*"My hope lives not because I am not a sinner, but because I am a sinner for whom Christ died; my trust is not that I am holy, but that being unholy, HE is my righteousness. My faith rests not upon what I am or shall be or feel or know, but in what Christ is, in what He has done and in what He is now doing for me. Hallelujah!" Charles Spurgeon*

**Truth: Our soul needs to meditate upon and rejoice in Jesus' atoning death. Without our rejoicing in Jesus' death, we have no strength to overcome the enemies of sin and Satan.**

**Jesus helps us to walk the path of discipleship through . . .**

1. His progressive work. (8:22-26)
2. His powerful reign. (8:27-30)
3. His atoning death. (8:31-33)

**4. His glorious promise. (8:34-38)**

*34 And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul?"*

The call to be a disciple of Jesus is all-encompassing. It requires us to yield all that we are and have to Him so that He can give us everything pertaining to life.

*For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."* (Mark 8:34-38 [ESV](#))

**Jesus moves His disciples from the cross, to the grave, to the resurrection . . . and now to His glorious return.**

Many disciples of Jesus give very little thought to the return of Jesus. Yet Jesus constantly takes us to that promise because of its importance to our soul.

THE LORD'S PRAYER: Thy kingdom come. A future day.

**On that day, we will give an account of our life and the bargains we have made in this life will be revealed for what they are.** Those who decided to lose the advantages of this present world, will discover that the bargain they made yields a return so great as to sustain happiness all through eternity. Those who decided to scramble for the advantages of this present world will discover that the bargain they made was not worth it.

Some will suffer the eternal loss of their soul. What sobering truth. To be forever and ever under the wrath of God is a consequence so great that nothing in this world compares to it. God uses eternal fire to describe it, but this analogy falls short of the misery wrapped up in it. I urge you, “Do not forfeit your soul for passing pleasures!”

*And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”’ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”’ (Luke 12:16-21 [ESV](#))*

Christian, there is a word for us too. Do not bring sorrow to your soul!

*Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.” (1 Corinthians 3:12-15 [ESV](#))*

Live in a way that your future self will thank you!

**Truth: Our soul needs to meditate upon and rejoice in Jesus’ promised return. Without our rejoicing in Jesus’ second coming, we will grow discouraged by the present world and its problems.**

Conclusion: Why would a person be tempted to run back into a burning house to gather a few things? --**False confidence in navigating the danger.** --**Undervaluing the thing we put at risk.** --**Overestimating the value of the things in the house.**

Live as wise people and not as fools!

**Main Idea: Jesus labors to makes us disciples who love God with all our soul. He works to rescue our soul from ruin. He labors to strengthen soul so that we win the battle against sin and Satan.**