

work of healing was completed. Immediately it was obvious that more needed to be done, Jesus acted and laid hands on the man once again. Jesus did not give up with the blind man until he was healed, and neither did He give up on the disciples until they were able to fully understand who He was and confess faith.

Application

If we focus for a moment on the individual blind man who Jesus healed on that day, then we note that he was brought along to Jesus by friends who had faith that Jesus would heal him. He then allowed himself to be taken outside the familiar surroundings of his village by Jesus, and although we who are sighted might not think about this, what he did demonstrated a considerable degree of trust and faith in Jesus. A blind man will not usually be led anywhere by someone who is a complete stranger! So what happened to the blind man was that through others initially, his own faith in Jesus was brought out. More than that, He was able to have confidence in Jesus to accept what was done to heal him, and respond honestly about his partial recovery so that Jesus could complete the healing.

This passage along with other similar ones in the healing stories of Jesus, demonstrate the great importance and privilege of our bringing our friends and family to the Lord in prayer. Our prayer and our deeds can help to bring out the faith in others which will help them especially when they need help and need the Saviour. But this passage also teaches us that there are times when we need to allow other people to 'bring us to Jesus', so that we might be led to Him and be healed of our problems and diseases.

Lastly, this study has spent a considerable amount of time describing how this incident was like a parable which described what was happening to the disciples. Something similar can happen today. When the Lord heals someone or does some other miraculous work in their lives, then what happens to that person can be a 'parable' of what the Lord wishes to do for someone else, or even another group of people. The only way for this to work is if those who have been healed or blessed testify to what has happened to them. It may be your experience as it is mine, that when people testify to God's gracious work or blessing in their lives, then this frequently touches other people and speaks to them in ways which can be very powerful. What happens to one becomes a 'parable' for others.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. What can be gained by seeing this incident as a parable of what was happening to the disciples?
2. Discuss in your group how you respond to the two different stages of the blind man's healing.
3. Why do you think that Jesus told the man to go home but not to go 'to the village'?

Discipleship

How often do you bring other people to the Lord in prayer? Some people do this regularly, and others find it very difficult to do. Try writing down a list of your friends, work colleagues and relatives. If we assume that you pray for those closest to you daily, then make a priority list of people you feel you should pray for each week, and then make a second list of everyone else to pray for monthly. When you pray each day, then by using both lists you will have some names to use which will help you pray, even if very briefly, for those who mean most to you.

Final Prayer

Keep us closely within Your purposes for us, Lord Jesus. We may not understand them, we may not see them clearly, we may not get things right, and at times we may not want to follow them; but lead us along Your path, Lord Jesus. You know us through and through; keep us within Your will, we pray; AMEN

Prayer

Lord God, You surprise us by the wonder and the privilege of Your presence. You are the Creator of the World and You hold the entire mystery of the Universe within Your grasp; and yet, You have also created every human being with care and with passion. We therefore ask You to move by Your Spirit to defeat the evil which blinds people to Your presence, and reveal Yourself to all. Lord God, we praise You for Your glory: AMEN.

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: The Bible and the Church

Pray today for the distribution of the Bible within your own country. Many editions of the Bible are produced for commercial reasons; presents for children, baptism or wedding gifts, for example. Many people are bewildered by the range of Bibles on offer, and many Bibles are purchased, but few are read. Pray that God will draw people to His Word across your nation.

Meditation

When the events of a day fade within the memory, and the evening casts its shadow over all the work, the eating, the conversations, the excitement, the disappointments, the challenges and the opportunities of the day; then say to Your Lord,

Speak Your word of life that we may hear it;
Heal our hurting souls where we most need it;
Cheer our flagging spirits because we yearn for it;
Restore us, body, soul and spirit, for we expect it;
Grant your Holy Spirit, so that we may receive it;
And save us now, even though we don't deserve it;
For we declare You are our Saviour, and we mean it!

So close the day and sleep soundly, leaving the cares of the world and all your worries in the hands of the Saviour. Leave the day behind, before you greet another!

Bible Study - Mark 8:22-26

²² They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought to Him a blind man, and begged Jesus to touch Him. ²³ He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. He spat on his eyes and laid His hands on him and asked, 'Do you see anything?' ²⁴ He began to regain his sight and said; 'I see people, but they look like trees, walking!' ²⁵ Then Jesus laid His hands on the man's eyes once again, and he then saw everything clearly. He was restored and continued to see everything clearly. ²⁶ Jesus sent him home and said, 'Don't even go into the village.'

Review

This is wonderful story about the healing of a blind man which is remembered largely because of the two stages of healing which he underwent at Jesus' hands (8:23,25). For some reason, the healing of this man was not as instantaneous as many of the others we read about in Jesus' ministry, for example, the deliverance of the Canaanite woman's daughter (7:24-30), and the healing of the deaf man (7:31-37). Moreover, the half-way point in the miracle is marked by an amazing comment by the blind man as he begins to recover his sight; 'I see people, but they look like trees, walking!' (8:24). It is therefore easy to see how this story has become a standard text for explaining why it is that many people who pray for healing do not appear to be completely healed immediately. People who receive prayer ministry will often testify that God's healing of their condition has taken them on a path of several stages. This Scripture appears to

give a Biblical precedent for such an experience, and this can be a comfort to those whose healing is not yet complete.

The blind man in this story, however, was nevertheless healed in a short period of time, and it is wise to study other Scriptures to find a fuller explanation of why healing ministry today can sometimes take time. Although this is dramatic, the two stage healing is only one aspect of a story which has a specific purpose at this point in Mark's Gospel. This particular healing story is not found anywhere else in any other Gospel, even though Jesus heals several blind men in each Gospel (though John 9:1-7 is reckoned by some to be the same incident because of its reference to Jesus' 'spittle'). It stands right at the heart of Mark's Gospel, at the conclusion of Jesus' healing and teaching ministry to Jews and Gentiles (1:16-8:21), and at the conclusion of the two cycles of incidents which followed the feeding of the five thousand and the four thousand respectively (6:30-7:37 and 8:1-8:21; for a discussion of this, see yesterday's study). In addition, this story stands directly before the great turning point in the whole Gospel, in which Jesus asks the disciples what they think about who He is, eventually obtaining from Peter the crucial confession 'You are the Messiah' (8:27-30).

In recent studies we have seen how Mark's Gospel has arrived at this point of transition, and the passage we have read today is important for our understanding of it. Before this passage, the disciples failed to see or understand the spiritual significance of Jesus' work, and they did not even understand the feeding of the five and the four thousand (8:14-21). Later, they made confessions of faith in Jesus, and the disciple's eyes were spiritually 'opened'. This triggered the second phase of Jesus' ministry in which He taught the disciples about the meaning of the Kingdom of God and the future they faced including His death and resurrection (8:31-10:52). Immediately after this teaching, Mark records Jesus' journey towards Jerusalem and His final hours; 11:1-16:8. There is no question; this incident stands at the very centre of Mark's Gospel.

With this in mind, our simple story about a man who was brought to Jesus by the faith of others and trusted Him for his healing until he was completely restored, is in fact a parable of faith in Jesus. It explains what happened to the disciples, and it can explain something of our own spiritual journey. It tells us that although faith is required, it is Jesus alone who can take away spiritual 'blindness' and enable people to see Jesus clearly as Messiah.

Going Deeper

There are many details within this story which we can explore now we know how it is placed within the Gospel of Mark. You may also notice that my translation is a little different from the main Bible versions available. Most Bibles translate this story so that it reads simply like a healing story which stands alone as a Sunday service reading. However, my translation is closer to the slightly awkward Greek original, which helps us see the passage's true colours marking this major transition in Jesus' ministry.

What happened as the man was brought to Jesus?

We must remember that in the context of the whole Gospel, the disciples were smarting from a sharp comment by Jesus about their inability to comprehend the spiritual meaning of what they were doing with Jesus, and what was happening around them (8:17-21). They do not appear in this incident; indeed, 'others' brought the blind man to Jesus (8:22). It is interesting that in the very next healing story in Mark (the healing of a boy with a spirit – 9:14-29), the disciples acted differently, and although unsuccessful, had attempted to help (9:18); Jesus did not rebuke them, but taught them what to do (9:29). This change illustrates the importance of this incident for the disciples, and the spiritual blindness from which they were healed.

The blind man was brought to Jesus, and Jesus took him 'outside the village' (8:23). This comment is strange, because Bethsaida (8:22) was a large town on the northern shore of Lake Galilee. Many have tried to explain this, some by saying there was more than one 'Bethsaida' bordering the Sea of Galilee (without there being any archaeological proof of it). It is my opinion that the issue can be explained simply. Most large towns and cities are encircled by smaller 'villages' which are sometimes drawn into the sprawl of the town as it grows. Jesus was merely dealing with a man from one of the 'villages' on the edge of the larger town of Bethsaida.

Looking at the story as a whole, Jesus seems to have wanted to keep this healing a private matter. After the blind man was healed, Jesus said very strongly, 'don't even go back to the village'. Jesus made such commands after most of His healing miracles (e.g. see 7:36), because He was cautious about people responding to Him merely as a healer, rather than the

Messiah who demonstrated the healing power of God. Mostly, the people Jesus healed rejected what He said about secrecy and told everyone what had happened. In this case, the reading does not tell us whether the man obeyed Jesus or not, and it implies that he was obedient. Given that the incident was not just a healing story but also a parable about receiving spiritual sight (see above), Mark may have felt that the story fulfilled its purpose as it was.

It is also worth noting that there are similarities between this story and the healing of the deaf and dumb man (7:31-37). In both cases, the men were brought to Jesus (7:32, 8:22), and He took them 'outside' (7:33, 8:23). But the parallels do not stop there. In both stories, Jesus used spittle and His touch is emphasised (7:33,34; 8:23,25), and He also gave a command to keep the matter quiet (7:36; 8:26). If you have followed recent studies you will see that each story concludes a 'cycle' of stories which began with a feeding miracle (6:30-43; 8:1-10), but probably the most important reason why Mark chose to tell these incidents out of all the miraculous healing done by Jesus, is that together they fulfil Isaiah's prophecy 'then the eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf be unstopped ...' (Isaiah 35:5), which were a well known Messianic prophecy. At this point in the Gospel, Mark is therefore telling us that Jesus has fulfilled prophecy, and the evidence of this is there for all to see.

The healing miracle

Jesus, having taken the blind man outside 'the village', immediately dealt with the situation. You may find that your own Bible version translates what comes next in this way; 'when He put saliva on his eyes ...' (8:23), but the Greek of this verse is quite explicit, and says 'He spat in his eyes!' This sounds rather crude, but it is true to what Mark has written, and captures Jesus' direct and dramatic approach to the healing. What Mark describes is the power of Jesus' saliva to wash away the blindness in the blind man's eyes, combined with the power of His touch, for as He did this, He; 'laid His hands on him ...' (8:23). As with all Jesus' miracles, we are not in a position to explain what happened or why it 'worked', we are left to wonder at what happened.

If we remember the point made above that the story is a parable of Jesus' removal of the disciple's own spiritual blindness, then Jesus' strange healing 'technique' makes more sense. To spit in someone's eye was an insult in ancient times, just as today; now if we look back to yesterday's reading, we find that Jesus had just insulted the disciples rather strongly in order to make them face their spiritual blindness (8:17). There is a clear parallel between the two incidents. In the case of the blind man, Jesus' 'insult' led to the healing of his sight, and in the case of the disciples, Jesus' 'insult' (8:17) led to the disciples having to face their weaknesses and as we will read tomorrow, find faith. In today's world, we could say that Jesus gave strong positive criticism, and the disciples, fortunately, responded to it well.

The parallel between what happened with the blind man and what was happening to the disciples does not stop there. The next startling thing about the healing is what we observed at the beginning of the study, which is the fact that the healing did not take place all at once. It happened in two stages. Firstly, the blind man 'began to regain his sight and said ...' (8:24), and then later, 'He saw everything clearly ... He was restored.' (8:25). Again, it is unfortunate that this progression is not always as clear because some Bible translations use an alternative rendering of the verb at the beginning of verse 24, and translate, 'He looked up' instead of 'He began to regain his sight ...' (8:24). Both of these translations are possible from the Greek, but the one in our passage above makes the progression in the healing much clearer; he began to see, and then he saw clearly.

If we now look at how the disciples responded to Jesus in the story which follows this (8:27-30), we find that their insight into who Jesus was followed a remarkably similar progression. Jesus asks the disciples about who He is, and at first they began to understand, quoting what other people said about Jesus, that He was 'John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets ...' (8:28). This was the first stage of their spiritual enlightenment. Then Jesus asked 'who do you say that I am?' and Peter responded with full understanding; 'You are the Messiah!' This was the second stage; for led by Peter, the disciples now understood clearly who Jesus was.

The last feature of this remarkable little story is that if you read it in its original Greek, then you gain the distinct impression that Jesus and the blind man were very close to each other all the way through this encounter. With Jesus just having spat in his eyes, the blind man said; 'I see people, but they look like trees walking!' (8:24). Now the man may well have cast his eyes around when making this comment, seeing things vaguely but without proper focus. Nevertheless, the person right in front of him was Jesus, and Jesus did not leave him until the