

Spiritual Blindness, Part 2

Mark 8:11-21

41-38

Back in the gospel of Mark, if you will. I was reading this week in kind of a random fashion and I came across an interesting little account. In France, some years ago, there lived a poor blind girl and she had obtained, according to the writer, a gospel of Mark in Braille and it was all she had. She read it with the tips of her fingers and she read it and read it and read it until her fingers became callous and her sense of touch diminished so that she could no longer distinguish the characters.

In an ill-conceived effort to re-sensitize her fingers, she cut them at the ends which only made them less sensitive. And the writer says she felt that she must now give up her beloved book of Mark and weeping she pressed it to her lips saying, "Farewell, farewell, sweet Word of my Savior."

To her surprise, her lips more delegate than her fingers discerned the form of the letters. All night she perused with her lips the book of Mark and overflowed with joy at this new acquisition.

I don't know how precious the book of Mark is to you, but I hope it's precious, it is to me. And the more I go through this book, the more hours I spend in this book, the more precious it has become to me.

Let's open the Bible to Mark chapter 8 verses 11 to 21...chapter 8, verses 11 to 21, (John meant to say chapter 8, not chapter 5) "The Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him...that is with Jesus...seeking from Him a sign from heaven to test Him. Sighing deeply in His spirit, He said, "why does this generation seek for a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation." Leaving them, He again embarked and went away to the other side. And they had forgotten to take bread, and didn't have more than one loaf in the boat with them. And He was giving orders to them, saying, "Watch out! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." They began to discuss with one another the fact that they had no bread. And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? Having eyes, do you see...do you not see? Having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember, when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces you picked up?" They said to Him, "Twelve." When I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up? They said to Him, "Seven." And He was saying to them, "Do you not yet understand?"

Now I told you last time when we began to look at this text, it's two parts, that we're going to talk about spiritual blindness. First of all, spiritual blindness that is permanent. Secondly spiritual blindness that is temporary. In verses 11 to 13 you see the permanent spiritual blindness and then in the middle of verse 13, on down to verse 21, temporary blindness. I told you then that everybody born into the world is born in the darkness, born in spiritual blindness. Everyone born into the world by virtue of being human is cut off from spiritual reality. I know people think they're spiritual. There

are even spiritualists. But the fact of the matter is, 1 Corinthians 2:14 says, "The natural man understandeth not the things of God, to him they are foolishness because they are spiritually discerned and he is spiritually dead."

So every human being comes into the world blind in the darkness by virtue of being human. Add to that the fact that sin compounds the blindness, John 3:19 and 20, "Men love the darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil." Sin compounds natural blindness.

According to 2 Corinthians 4:4, Satan then compounds it again, "The god of this world has blinded the minds of them who do not believe lest the light of the glorious gospel should shine under them." Man is naturally blinded, sinfully blinded, satanically blinded. There is a profound blindness that engulfs the souls of all human beings. It can also become a sovereign blindness. There are illustrations of that in the ministry of our Lord Jesus as well as in other places in the Scripture. But in Luke 19 Jesus basically said to the Jews, "No more, no more, it's over. You ignored the day of your heavenly visitation and now you have no opportunity." And they were confirmed in their darkness.

That leads a fifth kind of blindness, eternal blindness. Hell is outer darkness. We all come into the world blind but we don't all leave the world blind. Some of us come to see. Some of us are delivered out of the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of God's dear Son. Some of us come to the light of the world in whom all darkness is dispelled. Some of us who were darkness have now become light. Some of us walk in the light. We were all blind, some permanently and some temporarily.

By this time in Mark's gospel, by the time we come to this point, it's been over two years that Jesus has been ministering openly, publicly and doing miracles that are literally unable to be counted. The gospel of John ends with a statement that everything He did couldn't even be contained in all the books of the world. His miracles were public, open, undeniable. Even Nicodemus, the teacher of the Jews, said, "We know You come from God because no one can do the works you do except God be with him."

But no matter how brightly the light was shining, sinners love the darkness. And when the light came like bugs scrambling back under the rock, the sinner dives deeper into the darkness to avoid the light. The light came but they did not comprehend the light, John says.

The leaders of Israel loved the darkness, hated the light. The people who followed them were in the same category. The leaders of Israel and the people who followed them were devoted to their delusion of self-righteousness, their delusion of ritualistic ceremonial legalistic religion.

But, on the other hand, there was a small group of men and women who saw the light and followed the light. They're known as disciples, that includes the Apostles and other followers of Jesus. Disciple is the word *mathetes*, it means learners. They followed Jesus. They turned their back on the darkness. They followed the light. And this is a crucial point here in the ministry of Jesus in Galilee because it is here that the leaders of Israel on behalf of the nation make their final verdict that Jesus is not their Messiah, not their Savior. They reject Him finally and according to verse 13, when it says, "Leaving them," you can see that metaphorically. Not only did He leave them physically on the northwestern shore of Galilee but He abandoned them in the sense of Romans 1 to their darkness and their unbelief. The question then was, who would follow Jesus because whoever followed Jesus would be turning his or her back on the religion of their ancestors, the religion of their nation, the

religion of their past life? And that's exactly what the disciples did. Those who went with Jesus followed the light. Spiritual blindness, for them, was only temporary.

Do you understand that the hardened heart is a problem for religious people? You understand that? An ignorant heart can't harden itself against the truth. Do you understand that? An ignorant heart can't hardened itself against the truth. To harden oneself against the truth, one self has to be exposed to be exposed to the truth. Only a knowing heart can hardened itself. That's why those closest to Jesus, namely the leaders of Israel and the people who followed them, and the disciples, stood in the greatest danger of heart hardening. And so does anybody who sits under the truth. The leaders of Israel and the nation that followed them, followed them in to permanent blindness, into judicial blindness, judgment, and into outer darkness.

I gave you three features of those people in verses 11 to 13. One, they were comfortable with others in the darkness, even though they were their enemies, the Pharisees and the Sadducees who were enemies of each other, both in the darkness hated the light and so they came together against Jesus. Secondly, those who are permanently blind are not only comfortable with others in the darkness but their consigned to a greater darkness. They go deeper and deeper as revelation ceases. And finally they're condemned to permanent darkness, the outer darkness of hell.

Now in verses 13b through 21, we're going to look at temporary blindness. Now we're going to move from those people who hardened against the Lord to those who followed Him as the light. Verse 13 it says, "He again embarked," that is, He got back in the little boat with which they traversed the northern part of the Sea of Galilee, going back and forth from the northeast to the northwest shore. They've been doing that a lot recently in the gospel of Mark. They're on the northwest shore near Capernaum there where they were assaulted by the Pharisees. "And after this in a symbolic gesture, the Lord leaves and the light goes and it's gone. And He takes all His followers who have seen the light, embraced the light, and are following the light with Him.

Verse 14 says, "And they," and that means the disciples, those same ones who embarked and went to the other side, they're mentioned in verse 10, "The disciples." They came across to the northwest, now they go back to the northeast. They were once blind. They were as blind as the rejecters because they were a part of the religion of Judaism, apostate Judaism, pervade by the Pharisees. They were as blind as they were, but now they have come to see the light. Their eyes have been opened. The light has shined unto them. They have understood the light and the light is increasingly bright as they follow Christ. They are the believers. They have cursed the darkness of ignorance. They have cursed the darkness of sin. They have sought to walk in the light. They understand the cost, the price. They have forsaken all. They will be thrown out of the synagogue. They will be dispossessed by family and friends. They are going to follow the light. The Lord is the light. The Lord is their teacher. He gets in the boat and they get in as well, and there may have been even several boats.

So our Lord takes His disciples back again by boat across the lake after a brief visit to the northwest side. This fixes the rejection of the leaders of Israel and is the last time our Lord publicly ministers in Galilee. There will be a later ministry in Galilee. If you look at chapter 9 verse 30, there will be one more sweep through Galilee. It says, "He began to go through Galilee but He didn't want anybody to know about it, no more public ministry for He was teaching His disciples.

This is a cut-off point. They are fixed in their darkness. This is a monumental moment in the history

of our Lord's ministry. And you would have thought the disciples would have said, "Lord, wow! This is dramatic. Could you tell us more about this? Can you tell us what this all means?" But that was not on their minds. Verse 14 says, "They had forgotten to take bread and didn't have more than one loaf in the boat with them." They were thinking about lunch.

So whatever light they had seen, and it wasn't a lot of light. This basic struggle for food is part of a primitive world, we understand that. But to be preoccupied with lunch when there were these massive issues going on of faith and rejection? It seems pretty short-sighted to men.

So for whatever light they do see, whatever light there is shining, there's a lot of blindness left. But let's look at little more at it and let's pick up the positive things.

If you're in the light point 1, you're comfortable with the light. People in the darkness were comfortable with the darkness. These are comfortable with the light. That's why they went. That's why they got in the boat. They followed Jesus. They sought the truth. They shunned the darkness. They escaped the blindness. The Jews loved their darkness. They leave the encourageable blind Pharisees and Sadducees and their religious system behind and they followed the rejected Lord, the one they know now to be the light of the world. And in following Him, they will have ever more and more light. Jesus had said to them, "Look, it's been given to you to understand the truth, but it's not been given to them." They're interested in the truth, they follow close behind Christ. They leave the blind guides behind. They leave the blind leaders of the blind behind. They leave the enemies of the truth behind. That's the first thing that marks the people of the light, they run to the light, the light of holiness and the light of truth.

And Jesus speaks to them about a very important issue if they're going to sustain the strength of this commitment. This is a big break for them. This is a very big break. They have turned their backs on their entire society and they need to be aware that they're in danger. And so, our Lord says to them in verse 15, He was giving orders to them, He was giving, imperfect tense, repeatedly, this is a boat, this is full of people, this is a conversation and He's speaking to them. And what's He saying? "Watch out, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." Double warning, present imperatives, intense, severe warnings against the influence of the Pharisees and against the influence of Herod. Matthew in the parallel account in Matthew 16 adds that He also said, "Beware of the leaven of the Sadducees," all the influential people. Pharisees were the legalists. Sadducees were the liberals, and Herod, Herodians were the secularists. Beware, watch out, I'm warning you! That is so foundational to new believers, isn't it? Because they are so susceptible to be tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine, according to Ephesians. There's a vulnerability among those who have just begun to see the light. Beware of the present, ever-present influences of legalism, liberalism, secularism. Leaven is a biblical illustration of permeation, influence. Yeast is what it is. Yeast makes dough rise by bacterial corruption. This is what that is talking about.

By the way, leaven twice in the New Testament is used positively in Matthew 13:33 and Luke 13:21 to speak of the events of the Kingdom. Every other time it is used to speak of the evil permeating influence of sin as it is used here. You need to be warned that you're still going to be surrounded by the Pharisaic religion. You're still going to be surrounded by the Sadducean liberalism. You're still going to be surrounded by the influences of Herodian secularism and all of these have an invisible, permeating, corrupting power when you're exposed to it.

The leaven of the Sadducees was the leaven of liberalism. They...they...they denied the

supernatural. The leaven of the Pharisees was the leaven of the influence...or the corrupting influence of legalism, externalism. The leaven of Herod, the corrupting influence of being politically engaged. And they all rejected Christ...the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Herodians. And they all came together even though they were enemies of each other against Him. Jesus is urging a full break with all the satanic ideologies of the past cause all those things had influenced them. When you come to Christ, you set everything in the past aside, you make a clean break with all past ideologies. These influences are still dangerous.

So I told the parents last night, I met with them, how can some school call themselves Christian colleges and a student comes there and they do everything they possibly can to expose students who come from Christian families to corrupting, lying, deceiving ideologies? That's the work of Satan, that's not the work of God. You run from that, you flee from that, you protect people from that. Jesus is the model educator. He's the protector of His students. He will teach them and He will protect them. He will tell them what they need to know and what they need to do and what they need to be aware of and run from and avoid.

Well, verse 16, here's their response. "They began to discuss with one another the fact that they had no bread." What? Look, I've only got a couple of minutes to talk about what Jesus said in verse 15 and you could preach forever on it...there's so much in that, I'd be asking a hundred questions. How can I recognize the leaven? How do I know when I'm succumbing to it? How do I avoid it? What do I do to insulate myself against it? What are we going to do to provide an alternative? There are a hundred questions. And they're looking at each other and saying, "What are we going to do for lunch?" What? Is it any wonder...if you question the patience of Jesus, you don't know this...how patient was He with them? Some spiritual blindness definitely remain. They were comfortable with the light. They loved being with Jesus and being with others who wanted to be with Jesus. But they needed more light, and that's the second point, they were conducted to greater light. They missed the entire meaning of the warning.

You want to know the truth? In Matthew 16:12 it says, "When Jesus said leaven, they thought He was talking about actual bread." Oh my goodness. You know, here Jesus is warning... beware, watch out...and He's talking and they're so preoccupied with lunch that all they hear is the word "leaven," and they think He's warning them to make sure they don't eat leavened bread. Stick with the flat bread. What? You know, it's a scary thing. If Jesus has trouble keeping the attention of His audience, what hope do I have? And all of you who are thinking about lunch may be extracting out of everything I say only those words that relate to your coming meal. That's what they did. We all hear through the grid of our preoccupations, don't we? That's discouraging, I don't want to talk about that anymore.

But in the goodness of the Lord, they are conducted to greater light. Now remember, the Pharisees and the Sadducees had said, "Show us a sign. Show us a sign. Give us more light." You've rejected all the light you've had, no more light. The people who are permanently in the darkness are comfortable with the darkness, they're only going to experience more darkness and they're going to be condemned to everlasting darkness. But those who are in the light who are comfortable with the light will be conducted to greater light. And the Lord shows His patience here and in verse 17, Jesus is aware of this, He's obviously aware of their conversation, He said to them, "Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread?" Why is this such a dominating issue that you aren't hearing anything I'm saying that is so absolutely critical? You know, you would think this was a class of third graders why can't pay attention.

Then a series of rhetorical questions. "Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? Having eyes do you not see? Having ears do you not hear?" All of those statements they were familiar with because Jesus had already told them earlier that those things apply to the people to whom He has hidden the truth. But He said, as I quoted in Matthew 13, "To you it has been given to know the mysteries, to understand." And now He's saying, "Are you no better than they are? Are you as dark as they are?" This is rhetorical. No wonder He warned them about their influence. "And do you not remember?" He says. "Do you not remember when I...verse 19...broke the five loaves for the five thousands, how many baskets full of broken pieces you picked up?" They said, "Sure we remember, twelve."

"And when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up? And they said to Him, Seven. Do you remember? Do you remember a few weeks when I fed the five thousand men plus women and children, a crowd of 20 - 25 thousand? Sure, we remember the twelve baskets, one for each of the Apostles. Do you remember the feeding of the four thousand?" That was, by the way, in chapter 8 verse 1 through 8, that's immediately before this. This is like days before, a few days. That...then they cross, then they go back...have you forgotten? No, no, we remember, seven. I just fed 20 thousand people twice at least and you're worried about lunch on the boat? Don't you remember?

Isn't it astonishing that in the present moment, in the stress of the present moment we forget the fulfillments of God's care in the past? Why in the world are you thinking about that when you ought to think about the dangerous things that are going to influence your soul?

But He's gentle with this and He says, "Do you not yet understand?" As if to say, what more do I need to do? And sometimes all you need to understand the moment is the past, right? Right? All you need to understand the present is the past. The past is the best indicator of how to view the present. If God has been faithful in the past, He'll be faithful in the present. If He's provided in the past, He can provide in the present. They needed to be seeking the Kingdom, right? They needed to remember the Sermon on the Mount if they could remember that far back. "Don't take any thought for what you shall eat or drink. Seek the Kingdom, and I'll take care of the rest." Do you not yet understand?

Matthew is very explicit in his parallel account in Matthew 16:12, listen. "Then they understood." And the rest of the verse, "Then they understood that He didn't say to be aware of the leaven of bread but of the Pharisees and the Sadducees." Wow! Oh, oh, oh, You weren't talking about whether we could eat leaven bread, You were talking about the Pharisees and the Sadducees. That's a small step, right? That's a very small intellectual step, but it's a step. They've gotten off lunch on to bigger issues.

Jesus is a discipler, isn't He? And He just moves them along to greater light. Those who follow the light are comfortable with the light and they are conducted into greater light. Thirdly, they're permanent companions of the light. They came to Bethsaida in verse 2. They come along with Jesus to the villages of Caesarea, Philippi in verse 27. Chapter 9 they stay with Him through Galilee and they stay with Him all the way to the end. And some of them are gathered in Galilee when He makes a post-resurrection appearance, right? Five hundred of them, eyewitnesses, and they will be in the fellowship of the light forever. Jesus is the light of heaven, is He not? There's no light there for the Lamb is the light there.

Everybody's blind, either forever or only temporarily. The gospel offers light to the blind, light...the light of truth, the light of holiness and virtue through Christ. He alone is the light. Whoever follows Him will not walk in darkness.

Father, we thank You for a wonderful morning. What a delight it has been to fellowship, to sing, to worship, to pray, to read Your Word, to let it speak to us. But, Lord, in the end, what matters is that we be in the light. We be children of the light and not walk in darkness. For those of us who are in the light, there in us is no darkness at all. O Lord, how grateful we are that You have delivered us from the kingdom of darkness into the realm of Christ's light. We thank You that as we follow the light it grows brighter and brighter and brighter as we are sanctified and as we are led to greater, greater understanding. We will follow the light until we stand in the blazing glory of that light in Your presence in heaven. Thank You for rescuing us from the darkness. Lord, I pray that You would rescue souls, even now, this very hour in this place who have been in the darkness and have been unwilling to follow the light. May the light break on them. May the glorious light of the gospel shine unto them. Would You, the one who said, "Let there be light" make that light shine in their hearts. May Christ real and desirable and may they curse the darkness and turn from sin and ignorance to follow the light. O Lord, thank You for the light You've given us and the ever-increasing joy of a brighter and brighter light until the full light shines in Your presence. We thank You. We praise You.

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