



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Mark 8:22-30

Mark 8

"Opened Eyes and Peter's Confession"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Good morning. We're in the gospel of Mark and this morning we're looking at Mark 8:22-30.

And they came to Bethsaida and they brought a blind man to Him and entreated Him to touch him. Taking the blind man by the hand, He brought him out of the village, and after spitting on his eyes and laying His hands upon him, He asked him, "Do you see anything?" And he looked up and said, "I see men, for I am seeing them like trees, walking about." Then again He laid His hands upon his eyes, and he looked intently and was restored, and began to see everything clearly. He sent him to his home, saying, "Do not even enter the village." And Jesus went out, along with His disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, and on the way He questioned His disciples, saying to them, "Who do people say that I am?" They told Him, saying, "John the Baptist and others say Elijah. Still others, one of the prophets." And He continued by questioning them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said to Him, "Thou art the Christ." And He warned them to tell no one about Him.

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of study in it together. Shall we bow in a word of prayer?

[Prayer] Gracious Heavenly Father, what a privilege it is for us to come together this morning to sing hymns of praise to you and your grace and then to open the scriptures together and to study your Word, that which you have given to us as a great gift, the revelation of your

truth, revelation that unfolds you and your character and your power and your Will to us and unfolds a true understanding, a true perspective on what we are as people, the debt that we owe to you for the grace that you have extended to us in your Son, and we pray that as we study this passage together, we will be reminded of those truths and that they will have their proper influence upon us. May this be a time of good preparation for the days to come, the week that's ahead of us, that we would go forth from this place, be effective witnesses for you, well equipped to serve you and serve you faithfully.

It is a great privilege, Father, to study together. It is a great privilege to be able to come together and to remember the needs of those who have asked for our prayers and we do that this morning. We think of a variety of people. Pray for Jim Dean and pray that you bless the radiation treatment that he is undergoing for his tumor and pray that you would give good effect to that, that you would arrest the growth of that tumor and that you might relieve him of pain and restore him to health. Pray for Kim Ryan and ask that the operation she has undergone would continue to progress well, that she would heal successfully, you would bless her sight.

And so many others, Father, whose names are listed before us who've asked for our prayer requests. You know them. We pray that you'd bless them and those who have not sought our prayers but who are in great need who perhaps suffer somewhat in silence, we pray your blessing upon them. You know them just as well and you're just as concerned. We pray that you'd give them blessing. We pray for those who are suffering financially. Provide for them. Pray that you might provide employment for those who need it and for those who have it, we pray that you'd stir within us hearts of gratitude and thanksgiving because, Lord, we recognize that what we have, the good things that are ours, are not ours because we're particularly gifted.

If we have a gift, it's because you have given that to us. If we have the health that enables us to go to work every day, to have a clear mind and the ability to reason, we have that by your grace. You

made us that way. It's so easy for us to assume that these are what we are by virtue of who we are, we've somehow raised ourselves up and made ourselves what we are and that, Father, is a delusion. We are what you've made us. So we pray, Father, that you'd make us grateful. If we have jobs, it's because you've given them to us and we thank you for that.

We pray, Father, for those who may be suffering because of family problems, going through difficulties there. We'll pray that you would correct the problem and that you would encourage those individuals who are struggling with very difficult issues such as that and encourage them with the reminder that all of these things fit into your plan, all of these things are part of your work in changing us and making us more like your Son. You even use the dark moments of our life to bring character into our lives and to bring understanding into our hearts of your Will and your work, and so bless us in that way.

And bless us all with an interest to know your Word, to study the Scriptures, because this is where we come to know you. This is where you've revealed yourself to us. This is where we learn about your Son. And so we pray that you'd bless us with that desire. Bless our time as we study now together, and bless this church. May our witness be very clear. I pray that you'd build us up in the faith, make us a strong body of believers.

And bless our nation, Father, particularly bless our leaders whom you have placed over us. Bless them with wisdom. We pray that they would look to you but even if they don't look to you, we pray that they would have a sense of the greatness of their responsibility and that they would seek wise counsel in others, and we pray that you'd supply them with wise counsel, that this nation would be led in a proper way.

Bless our time now, Father, as we sing our final hymn. We pray that it would be a good time of spiritual preparation, that our hearts would be brought into close thinking on your thoughts, things that please you. Prepare our minds for a consideration of the Scripture

that we will look at this morning. We pray that all that we do would be done in a way that is edifying to each of us, glorifies your name, and exalts the person and work of your Son. Pray these things in His name. Amen.

[Message] This morning we reach something of a milestone in our study because we come to the midpoint of Mark's gospel and a very significant point with Peter's great confession that Jesus is the Christ. This isn't the beginning of Peter's faith nor the first time that the disciples confess that Jesus is the Christ. In the first chapter of John's gospel, they are following Him as the Messiah. In fact, in that chapter, Nathaniel makes an equally great confession to the one that Peter makes here. But this is the first time in Mark's gospel that the confession is made, and everything in the gospel has been building toward this. The Lord's power and miracles showing Him to be Lord over disease and demons with His healings and exorcisms, miracles showing Him to be Lord over nature with the calming of the storm on the sea, Lord over even sin and death with his authority to forgive sin and raise the dead.

All of these have been building toward chapter 8 and reach a crescendo in Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ. It's one of the central themes of this gospel which began on that very note in chapter 1 and verse 1, the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And so as we come to chapter 8, we really come full circle in our study, and yet while the passage is principally about Jesus and His identity, it also reveals much about our Lord's disciples and how it was that they came to confess Him as the Christ. How any man, for that matter, comes to confess the Lord as that, who comes to have faith in Him and have spiritual understanding.

To see that, I think that we have to see this great confession of faith against the disciples' recent failure of faith. You recall that the Lord and His disciples were in a boat headed for the other side of the Sea of Galilee. This is what we considered last week in our study, and as they traveled along, He warned them about the leaven of the

Pharisees. Well, failing to understand the meaning of His words, they began worrying about the bread that they had forgotten. They were more concerned about material needs than they were about spiritual truths, and so he rebukes them with the words: Having eyes, do you not see?

He'd just miraculously fed a multitude of people with a few loaves and fish. In fact, He'd done that for the second time and they were worried about food. It's as though they hadn't seen anything that He'd done, as though they were blind to His true identity. Now, the Lord wasn't saying in that question (Having eyes, do you not see?) that they were as blind as the Pharisees whom they had just left. They had a true understanding of the Lord but their understanding was dull. Their perception was blurred as to who He was. They fell far short of knowing Him like they should have known Him.

But then a short time later, in the passage we consider this morning, Peter makes a great confession of faith. "Thou art the Christ." So how do we account for this amazing change? How do we account for this clear understanding that he had? I think the key is found in the event that lies between their triumph of faith on the one hand and their failure of faith on the other. Mark records a miracle that is not recorded in any of the other gospels, one that demonstrates the nature of the Lord in that He has the power to heal, that demonstrates His divine nature, demonstrates His compassion, His concern. At the same time, it demonstrates the nature of faith, the origin of faith, and the spiritual understanding with the healing of a blind man.

Remember, the Lord has just criticized the disciples as blind, and then shortly after arriving in Bethsaida on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, He is recognized by the people, and a large group of people bring a blind man to Him and beg the Lord to heal the man with His touch. So we move from a criticism of blindness to an actual case of physical blindness. There are few conditions worse than blindness, and blindness was very much a scourge of the East. It was

due in part to eye disease as well as to the relentless glare of the sun. A very common expression in Israel is *ha shemesh*, the sun, it shines brightly in the Middle East and can be hard on the eyes.

The problem was also aggravated by a lack of hygiene. William Barclay graphically writes, "It was common to see a person with matter-encrusted eyes on which the flies persistently settled. Naturally, this carried the infection far and wide." And as you read through the gospels, you can't help but notice that the problem evidently was widespread. There are many people in the gospels who were blind. Even today, a common sight on Jaffa Street or at the Damascus Gate in Jerusalem is one of blind beggars. Well, there were many such people in our Lord's day, and one was brought to Him in Bethsaida.

Now, Bethsaida wasn't the Lord's destination. He was headed north, but He wasn't put off by this interruption of His journey, and He graciously responded to their request, but He does so in an unusual way. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. Now, that's unusual because normally He did his miracles publicly. He did them in the midst of the people, but here, it's done in private. So it's natural to wonder why He might have done this. And the reason may have to do with Bethsaida's unbelief. This isn't the first time that the Lord has been in that town, it's not the first time He's been in that region.

In fact, He's ministered quite a bit in that area of Galilee and yet without great response from the people. And earlier, Matthew records in chapter 11 the Lord's reproach of the cities around that northern part of the Sea of Galilee, the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, for not repenting and believing as a result of all the ministry that He'd done in that region. They had seen miracles. They had heard His teaching. They had received great light but had not responded to it. And when light is rejected, when the truth is not received, the witness is eventually removed. Perhaps the Lord was

hiding the miracle from the people who had grown callous to such revelation.

It's a dangerous thing to become too familiar with the truth, to become so familiar with it that we become a little indifferent to the truth of God. Well, that had happened to this region of Galilee, and that may be the reason that the Lord withdrew His presence, so to speak, from the midst of these people and hid that revelation of His power and grace. Or perhaps this is simply another of the many examples of our Lord's care and concern for the afflicted. He certainly gives a great deal of attention to this man, and he may have needed that attention in a way that others didn't. He had been brought to the Lord by a group of people, which may suggest that he was uncertain of the Lord, perhaps doubtful or unbelieving.

And so the Lord takes him away from the crowd to help him feel more at ease, to make a more personal contact with him and help him concentrate on the Lord, concentrate on the one who would bless him so that he wouldn't be distracted by the people and in so doing help this man become more involved with the cure that he was about to receive. Well, whatever the reason, the Lord takes the man outside the village where we read in verse 23 that He does two things. He spits on his eyes and then in an expression of compassion, He lays His hands on him. Both the touch and the use of saliva probably were intended to instill confidence in the man and to assure him that the Lord was going to heal him.

Now, to us the spitting on his eyes seems a very odd thing to do, but saliva was believed by the ancients to have medicinal value in it. And while that sounds strange to us, maybe even a bit gross, it's really not so strange when you remember that the first instinct that we have when we cut our finger or we burn our finger is to put it in our mouth to ease the pain, and so that may be one of the reasons why they had this idea that there was medicinal value in the saliva. So the Lord uses this as a symbol that man would understand, and in so doing He

was indicating to him that He would heal him, and He was encouraging the man's confidence and faith.

The result was the man was healed – sort of. The Lord asked him if he could see anything, and in verse 24 he answered, "I see men for I am seeing them like trees walking about." So he could see but not completely. His vision was blurred. Now, the fact that he had some idea of what trees and men looked like indicates that he was not born blind, this was a blindness that had come later, had come over some period of time. But more significantly, it indicates that the miracle was not complete, and that makes this miracle unique. It's the only case in which our Lord's healing was not instantaneous. This is the only case in which the cure the Lord would cause to occur occurred gradually. It occurred in stages.

The reason for that is not because the Lord's power failed and having tried once, he then had to try it again. The reason is probably, as Calvin suggested, to show that He had full liberty as to His method of proceeding. He was not restricted to any one way of dealing with a person, and we see that throughout the account of the gospels in the way that He deals with those who are in need. There's no fixed way that the Lord dealt with people. He deals with them in a variety of ways, in a way that they needed to be dealt with, and the spiritual condition of this man may have required a gradual process of healing in order to help his faith, in order to help him be involved in his cure and in so doing to learn from it and to understand what was taking place in his life.

And so with this initial contact, the man's sight is restored. For the first time in a long time, he sees something that looked like trees but he knew they couldn't be trees because they were moving about. He was seeing men, he concluded, probably seeing the disciples, but he wasn't see them clearly. So things were remarkably better but there was still something wrong.

Well, the Lord wasn't finished. And we read in verse 25, again He laid His hands upon his eyes and looked intently and was restored

and began to see everything clearly. So finally, the Lord's work was complete. It occurred in stages, and in that way it was unusual, but as one writer pointed out, all the anomalies, all the unusual features of this miracle indicate that the church didn't make this up. These things have a ring of truth about them. They suggest the reality that this is what took place, and it has instructive value as well. It has illustrative value in the gradual way in which this miracle was accomplished. And I think that is by design. It illustrates the way that faith and spiritual understanding occur.

Some people come to faith immediately when they hear the gospel and others, well, there's a struggle with the gospel in their life and that doesn't occur, their faith doesn't occur until many years later. Some hear the gospel from their parents as children and believe early in life; others hear early but they don't believe until late. Augustine is an example of that. He heard the gospel from his mother as a child but he fought against it for years until one day as an adult sitting in a garden in Milan under deep conviction of sin, he heard some children nearby singing, "Take it and read, take it and read." So he took up his Bible, he turned to Romans 13:13-14 and he came to faith. Paul's conversion came suddenly on the Damascus road with the Lord speaking to him out of a blinding light.

One was converted by children singing a children's song; the other by Christ in a flash of light. Men come to faith in different ways. Some dramatic ways, some simple ways. Some come early, some come late. And with all of us, the understanding that comes from faith is, to one degree or another, gradual. When a person's spiritual eyes are opened to the truth, they see the truth, they perceive the truth, but not completely. The truth of the gospel that most of us understood when we first believed was probably very shallow. Certainly it was incomplete. In fact, the subsequent knowledge that people obtain is sometimes so significant that they doubt that their earlier conversion was a genuine conversion.

Perhaps you've heard people talk about that. They came to faith five, ten years ago but over a period of time, they've come to learn some things and maybe suddenly things began to click in their thinking and they saw things in a different perspective altogether and they advanced in their understanding of the truth and they began to wonder if I really was a saved man or a saved woman back a number of years ago. Well, it's probably not a good idea to analyze our salvation by the strength of our faith or the amount of our knowledge. Faith the size of a mustard seed, small, weak faith is enough, and that faith will grow by God's grace.

Even the greatest theologian has small faith and limited understanding compared to our Lord, compared to the ideal. What man today could compare with the apostle Paul in faith and in knowledge? And yet Paul writes of himself and he writes of all of us, 1 Corinthians 13:12, "Now we see in a mirror dimly." Paul could say that of himself, the great apostle with all of his knowledge, he said, "For all of that, for all of the advances that I have made, all that I see, I see dimly." We're not going to learn it all in this life. In fact, really, as Paul goes on to say, it is not until we see face-to-face, until we are with our Lord, that we'll have an understanding of things. And yet even then, we really won't know everything there is to know because the subject that we study is infinite, it's eternal.

How can you ever come to the end of a knowledge of God, who is infinite? Who is eternal? We'll always be learning, always be growing, and that's certainly true in our life this side of the grave. But as a person responds in faith to the revelation that is given, there is real growth and we should be encouraged by that. We do develop in our faith. We do develop in our understanding. We grow from faith to faith. We develop from glory to glory, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:18. To everyone who has shall more be given, as our Lord says in one of His parables, and he shall have an abundance. That's an encouragement – it should be, at least, for us to apply

ourselves to the Scriptures, to study them, because as we do, we grow and we genuinely grow in our faith and our knowledge.

Finally, the process that the miracle followed reminds us that the Lord is never finished with us and He will complete the work that He has begun in our lives. If we're not satisfied with our present state of maturity or we're not satisfied with the level of understanding that we have reached – and I don't think we should be because we never come to the end, we never reach that final destination, but if we're not satisfied with it, we shouldn't despair. The Lord's not finished. We're still in the process. As I said, we'll always be in the process, and yet we have the promise of Philippians 1:6 that He who began a good work in us will perfect us until the day of Christ Jesus. That's a great encouragement. Great encouragement to persevere because He never casts us off. He's never finished with us.

So with the miracle complete, He sends the man home, and we read in verse 27 that the Lord and the disciples continued on north to Caesarea Philippi where the miracle that had occurred in the blind man would occur in the disciples.

The distance between Bethsaida and Caesarea Philippi is some 25 miles, so they had quite a bit of time to reflect upon the miracle that they had just witnessed, and they did that. This miracle was not lost upon them, and I suppose that the unusual nature of the miracle, the fact that it occurred in stages, must have arrested their attention to some extent and caused them to think more deeply upon it and perhaps reflect upon Scriptures that had direct bearing upon that because in Isaiah 35:5-6, Isaiah prophesied that when Messiah comes, the eyes of the blind will be open and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. The tongue of the dumb will shout for joy.

The Lord had healed a deaf mute back in chapter 7, not too much before this particular event, and now the healing of the blind man is another fulfillment of that great prophecy, indicating that Jesus is the Christ, He's the one that Isaiah was looking forward to, the of whom all of the prophets wrote, and not their eyes were about to be

opened because as they reflected on what had happened, the Lord would give them understanding, introduce knowledge into their hearts, just as He gave vision to the blind man's eyes.

Caesarea Philippi was outside Galilee, outside the region of Herod Antipas and was an interesting setting for the events that unfold there. The city was located at the source of the Jordan River on the slopes of Mount Hermon overlooking the northern end of the Jordan Valley. It's a beautiful area of Israel. Originally the site had been a center of Baal worship. Later the Greeks named it Paneas because it was the place that they believed that the god Pan had been born and Pan was the god of nature, and so there was a shrine there. In fact, you can still see that shrine with the reminders of the worship of this god Pan there in the side of the mountain.

Later, Herod the Great built a marble temple there to Augustus Caesar, who had given to Herod this city, and then Herod Philip rebuilt the city and renamed it in honor of Tiberius Caesar and himself, giving it the name Caesarea Philippi. So it was a very Roman city with a very pagan history where Caesar was recognized as lord. This was the place where Jesus chose to ask his disciples who they thought He was. But first He begins with a leading question in verse 27 by asking, "Who do people say that I am?" "What's the popular opinion about my identity?" The Lord, of course, knew what the people were saying.

He wasn't seeking information, he wasn't really curious about this, He was asking this question in order to prepare their minds for a second question. And in verse 28, they answer Him and give a variety of views that were circulating at the time. Some say John the Baptist and others say Elijah. Still others, one of the prophets. Each answer showing a high regard for the Lord, a recognition that He was an unusual and a good person and put Him in the company of great men. Some even describing Him as a supernatural person. John come back from the dead or the revived Elijah.

But as great as those men were, they were just men. Men who stood in the shadows as forerunners. Men who were looking for the Messiah. They were men who were great men, to be sure, men who had served the Lord, men who were prophets, men who were filled with the Spirit of God – but men who were fallible. Sinful men. Men in need of a Savior and men who were all looking for the coming of the Savior. And so the opinions of those ancient people, they're very much like the opinions that we hear today with modern people. Who do people today say that Jesus is? I suppose that if we took a poll of that in the city of Dallas, we'd hear much the same that the disciples were hearing in their day.

People would say, "Well, He's a great teacher." Some might say, "Well, Jesus was a prophet." Others would say, "A good example." Others, "The greatest man of history." Some might even claim that He was a supernatural person. All of these answers have been given throughout history, and there are all kinds of Jesuses today. The Mormon Jesus, the Jehovah's Witness Jesus, the Muslim Jesus. The classic Jesus of liberalism. But for all of the praise and all of the honor that men give to the Lord, what they give is honor to a finite creature. That's what the people of our Lord's day did. They saw Him as just one more in a long line of prophets, just a man, and really didn't understand Him at all.

In fact, to speak of God Almighty as anyone less than God, for all of the honor one might seek to be giving to Him, that's really no honor at all. In fact, it's blasphemy. And yet that's the way the people of Israel were looking upon Jesus.

Now, as I said, the purpose of His question was not to learn of all of the popular opinions about Him. He was leading up to a more important question, a more personal question, and in verse 29 He asks them, "But who do you say that I am?" There's great stress on the "you" in that question. It has the force of, "But you, who do you say that I am?" The Lord was deeply interested in these men. He knew that the nation had failed to understand who He was, but He wanted to

know how His disciples understood Him. Had they advanced in their thinking at all from their failure in the boat as they were crossing the sea?

And so in this pagan region, surrounded by reminders of false gods and Gentile myths, with Israel's failure on their minds, He asked them, "But what do you think? Am I just a prophet? Am I some man who has returned from the dead?" And speaking for all of the disciples, Peter answers, "No, no. You're more than that. Far more than that." "Thou art the Christ." Peter recognized that He was no forerunner. He was the fulfillment of all of the prophecies. He was the Messiah. He was the hope of Israel. He was the promised deliverer. "Thou art the Christ." It's one of the great themes of this gospel, one of the great themes of the whole Bible. Jesus is the Christ. He is the Messiah. That's what Christ means. The word "Christ" is simply the Greek translation of "Messiah," which means the anointed one of God.

In the Old Testament, it was used of anyone who was anointed with the holy oil. Priests, kings, they were anointed, and in being anointed, it signified that they were chosen of God, consecrated to His service, and endued with His power. They possessed the Spirit of God, who enabled them to do God's work. But it became a title of a specific person, the Messiah. And in the 9th chapter of the book of Daniel, we read the prophecy of Messiah the Prince. He was the central figure of Jewish expectation. He was the king of Israel, the one that they were looking forward to. In spite of Caesarea Philippi where Caesar was recognized as lord and declared a god and where that seemed to be supported by everything that surrounded these disciples. All of the glory of Rome that they saw.

In spite of that, Peter could look on Jesus, a homeless Galilean carpenter, a man evidently of simple appearance and confess, "Thou – Thou alone – art the Christ." And more than that, he saw God in Him. As Matthew records, Peter not only said, "Thou art the Christ" but also "the Son of the living God." And that's the full meaning of that

title, Christ. He is a divine person, that's the teaching of the prophets. Isaiah, for example, declared in chapter 7 of his prophecy that a child would be born and his name would be Emmanuel, God with us.

Later in chapter 9, he says his name, among the many names that he lists there, will be mighty God. So here at the center of Mark is the truth that's fundamental to the Christian faith, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. He is very God of very God. He is the second person of the Trinity who had entered into human history to tabernacle among men in order to die in the place of sinners in order that He might make them His people. Any consideration of Christ that is less than that, less than a consideration of Him as a divine as well as a human person, is not Christianity. It's a great confession of faith, central confession of faith to all of our beliefs. Peter made it.

Now, Peter was not clear on all of the things that we can see that are bound up in that term at this point. His confession was loaded with theology that he had not yet fully grasped as the events that immediately followed this will clearly demonstrate. But he had grasped the central truth. He had the seed of knowledge, and that seed, that knowledge, would grow. And it was no coincidence that Peter made this great confession in the place where he made it. The Lord had chosen Caesarea Philippi, with all of its pagan ideas, where Caesar was recognized as lord, as the place where he, where Jesus, would be confessed as true Lord.

I think there's something of an example in that for all of us. That's the calling of the church today. The calling of the church is not to feed the hungry of the world. It's not to clothe and shelter the homeless of the world. It's not to be doing those kinds of things, though those kinds of things are certainly an outworking of our faith. They're part of our faith. But that's not central to what we are to be doing as Christians. That's not the great calling of the church. The calling of the church is to do just what Peter did. It is to proclaim Jesus as the true Lord against all of the false lords of this world.

Against all of the false gods and false ideas of this dark age in which we live, we are to declare and proclaim Jesus the Christ, the Son of the living God.

It's a magnificent confession made by Peter, a confession that all of us are to make. Confession that Peter made in contrast to the one that not very much earlier he had made, along with the other disciples, which showed a very dull understanding of things, which called down upon them the Lord's statement, "Having eyes but not seeing, they're blind." What an amazing advance of faith we see here in Peter. But if Peter was feeling good about himself, the Lord quickly put things in perspective because in Matthew's account, his confession is followed by the explanation, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you but my Father who is in heaven."

Mark doesn't record that, but the truth that Matthew records in the words of our Lord, Mark illustrates in the healing of that blind man. That miracle of a man receiving sight anticipated the opening of the eyes of the disciples' understanding. That's a great theological truth, that God opens men's spiritually blind eyes, just as He opened man's physically blind eyes. Now, I say that's a great truth, but I think the tendency of probably many today is to ask, "Well, okay, that has theological interest to you, I suppose, Duncan, you're always talking about those kinds of things, but what practical interest is that? Where does that bit of doctrine touch my life?"

And to that, I would answer that all Biblical doctrine touches our lives and this truth that we're considering here, the sovereign work of God upon a person's life, that is particularly significant. What can be more fundamental to our walk with the Lord than knowing what He has done for us? That's not some pious platitude, that's not just the right answer or the right response, that is a very practical truth when you consider it. Martin Luther made the point very well in his book, *The Bondage of the Will*, stressing the necessity of knowing the

distinction between God's power and our power, between what God has done and what we have done in our salvation and our spiritual life.

He writes: "If I do not know these things, if I do not know the distinction between what God has done and what I have done, between His power and my power," he writes, "I cannot worship, praise, thank, or serve God because I shall never know how much I owe to God and how much to myself." If my faith is my work, if I've done it independent of anything God has done, I don't thank God for that. I don't praise God for the insight I have into the gospel and the fact that I have believed on it in contrast to all of these others who don't believe. If it's my work, I take credit for it, but if it's God's work, if He's performed that work within me, then I praise Him and then I worship Him.

Knowledge of God's power, of God as the source of all spiritual as well as material blessings, is the basis of genuine worship. With that truth, the truth that God is sovereign over all of the things in my life, that He's the source of all good things in my life, where do we find room for boasting? For self-confidence? For conceit? This is a great corrective to spiritual pride.

Paul used it very effectively with the Corinthians. They were a church for whom Paul had great affection, a church located in a din of iniquity. A port city frequented by sailors and merchants, Corinth was notorious for its immorality. There were opportunities there for men to satisfy every passion that they had, and that's where Corinth was located. That's where this light of the gospel went out, a place notorious for its immorality, and much of that was reflected in the history of the people who made up that church. Among their members were converted fornicators and idolaters, thieves, adulterers, homosexuals.

Paul lists them all in 1 Corinthians 6, but what a great church that was. Just think about it. What a cross-section of fallen humanity the church at Corinth represented and what a testimony to the power of God to save the worst of sinners. What an example of God's grace.

The gospel came to Corinth, God touched their hearts, and they became new creatures. Paul says of all of those whom God had called out of that immorality, says in chapter 6 and verse 11, "And such were some of you." And in that statement, we should underline that word "were." You were that way; you're no longer that way now. Such were some of you, but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified.

What an amazing change had come into the lives of these people. They had become new creatures in Christ, they had begun to grow in the faith, grow in their understanding of the Lord, grow in a knowledge of the things of God. Unfortunately, with their advance in the faith, pride crept in and so in 1 Corinthians 4:7, Paul asks them the question, "Who regards you as superior and what do you have that you have not received?" That's the important point of that quote. What do you have that you have not received? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?

Paul wasn't searching for answers with the questions that he was asking, he was making a point, and the point that he was making is they had received everything. There was nothing that they had not received. Now, that's grace. It's a gift. All that we have is a gift, and grace is comprehensive. It includes every good thing that have, from our health to our faith to our understanding of God's truth. So if you've come to know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, then you have God to thank for that. Flesh and blood did not reveal that to you but the Father in heaven.

Left to ourselves, we might have an understanding of the gospel. We might hear the gospel and we might have said, "Well, I know what you're saying, saying a lot about sin, and I know what you mean by sin. In fact, I can even define sin for ya. It's any wont of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God. You've made that plain and you believe that sin's a reality and you think I'm a sinner and because of that, that I'm headed for eternal destruction because God's a holy God and He punishes the sinner. And I understand that you are telling

me that Jesus is not just a man. Fully man but also God. That He is the eternal second person of the Trinity who entered into human history, took to Himself a human nature, and died in the place of sinners, and that if I simply believe in Him, trust in Him, then I'll be saved. I'll be delivered from that. I understand your meaning, but I'm sorry, it's just foolishness to me. I can't see any difference between that and some myth that the Greeks thought up about Apollo or some other strange idea of history. To me, it's just foolishness."

What is it that gave you not simply an understanding of the gospel but made it click in your mind to see? "Yes, I not only see that and I see that it's not foolish. It's true, it's real, and I believe it and I trust in the one that you're telling me about." How do you come to that? You come to it by the work of God. He's the one that opens the eyes to see the truth of it and to believe in it, and to understand that is to understand grace, and an understanding of grace is what disarms pride and fills us with gratitude and enables us to do works of gratitude. That's the grace of God. It has a very, very practical effect and influence upon our lives. It does touch our lives very significantly.

Well, Peter and the other disciples had made a great advance in their understanding. Their eyes had been opened and they showed real insight into the Lord's person and mission. But they still had much to learn. They had much to learn about the Lord's coming, suffering, about His death, about the cross, about the cross that they themselves would have to carry. So in verse 30, the Lord warned them to tell no one about Him. They still needed instruction before they were ready to proclaim the gospel. They would learn, like we all learn, by degrees, by stages over time, but they had the essential truth on which to build: that Jesus is the Christ.

Have you come to understand that? If the Lord were to ask you that question, the question that He asked the disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" how would you answer? Would you say, "Great teacher"? "Great example"? "The greatest man in history" or maybe

even "An angel"? There are a number of answers that men have given, those answers and others, answers that seem on the surface to honor Him and would honor Him greatly if He were just a man. But only one answer satisfied our Lord, and that's the answer that He is the Christ. He is the Messiah. He is God's chosen, eternal King, the Son of the living God. Is that your answer? Then are you following Him?

That's what we need to ask ourselves. If we've come to the realization, the understanding that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, that he demands our loyalty, demands our allegiance, are we following Him? Are we living a life of obedience to Him? Is our life an expression of gratitude to Him for the sacrifice that He's made for us and all of the grace that He's giving us and all that is ours yet to come? As I say, that's the question that we should be asking ourselves daily and living in light of that.

But if you have not answered as Peter answered, if you don't know who He is, then I urge you to consider the testimony of Peter. Consider the testimony of all of Scripture that looked forward to Him throughout the Old Testament, that looks back upon Him. That central figure of history. Consider what the Scriptures say and consider it prayerfully. Look to the Lord. Ask Him to give you understanding with the assurance that those who seek, find, and to those who ask, it shall be given. Know that God will reveal His Son if you seek Him, if you look for Him. And to all who look to Christ, all who believe in Him as the Son of God who died for sinners, to them He gives eternal life.

If you're here this morning and you don't know Christ as Savior, may God help you to do that, to look to Christ, who is the Savior, and in so doing, trust in Him and receive the forgiveness of sins. Shall we stand now for the benediction?

[Prayer] Gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for the truth that we are reminded of in this passage as we consider it. We are reminded that of ourselves, we're blind. We have no ability to perceive the truth of the gospel. We might understand what the gospel

says, but we don't see it as anything other than foolishness apart from your grace that opens our eyes to spiritual reality. We thank you for doing that, thank you for the life that we have and the understanding that we have through your grace, grace that is given to us in your Son. Thank you that you sent Him into the world to die for sinners and that we have life in Him and life in Him alone. If there be any in this auditorium this morning that do not know Christ as Savior, we pray that you would move upon their hearts, give them the realization of their lost condition, bring them to faith in Christ. Pray these things in His name. Amen.