

## ***Jesus heals deafness and blindness-Mark 7:31-8:26***

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*[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions, please get in touch with Pastor Derek at [dberry@calvarybaptistsc.church](mailto:dberry@calvarybaptistsc.church).]*

Take your copy of God's Word and meet me in Mark 8:1...

I can still remember the day like it was yesterday. I was in a meeting at my last job, and when I returned to my office, I was met with a text message from my wife. She said I needed to get to the hospital because she was going into labor. And that was the day that my life completely changed. Our first few months were challenging due to my impatience and inexperience with newborns. One thing that frustrated me was what seemed to be a lack of memory on Neriah's part. This may sound silly, but she just seemed to scream her heart out when hungry. Now I could understand smacking, sucking her lips, or opening and closing her mouth, but no, she would cry as if she didn't believe she would get fed. And it baffled me. I used to tell her, do you not remember the last hundred times you were provided with sustenance when you were hungry? There's never been a time that you were hungry and mommy and daddy didn't feed you.

What I discovered, which I should have already known, is that the newborn cerebral cortex, which plays a crucial role in memory, had yet to develop fully. So, although Neriah was delivered from her hunger every time she cried out, she had a hard time remembering, which caused her to cry out in doubt again.

As Christians, sometimes our spiritual cerebral cortex is not fully developed. No matter how often God has delivered us, we seem to forget about his loving, caring, mercy, and forgiveness, which causes us to run off into our sins. It causes us to believe we must fix our situation by employing our sinful means. It causes us to doubt the promises of God in the Scriptures. It is the thief of joy and satisfaction in Christ Jesus. Well, we're not alone. Christ's disciples also had a non-fully developed cerebral cortex in this passage. Despite the Lord Jesus' continual miraculous provision that they witnessed with their own two eyes, they, too, possessed a kind of partial blindness and deafness. However, they're graciously and sovereignly reminded of the supreme power and worth of the Lord Jesus.

We'll consider our passage in three points this morning:

1. Compassion and Satisfaction (8:1-10)
2. Caution and Scolding (8:11-21)
3. Christ, the Supreme (7:31-37, 8:22-26)

And since we have so much ground to cover, we'll read the text as we go instead of reading it all upfront. Our passage this morning is a sandwich of sorts. The buns are the two instances where Jesus heals individuals, one deaf and another blind. The meat deals with the spiritual deafness and blindness that Jesus also heals. I believe the physical healing is meant to highlight the fact that God also, and ultimately, brings spiritual healing to his people. Let's read the first ten verses of our text.

As we've seen repeatedly, the dynamic power and presence of the Lord Jesus is so magnetizing that it causes the people to forget that they're hungry. Apparently, the people were too far from their homes to make the journey realistically, but being in the presence of Jesus seemed to trump such a basic need. Perhaps somehow they heard and believed the rebuking words of the Lord Jesus to the devil, "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.*" And not only are they hearing the Word of God from the Lord Jesus, but they're in the very company of the Word of God himself! This Word who was in the beginning with God and who was God. This Word incarnate is who all things were made by, through, and for. This Word upholds the universe by his power. So, no wonder the people were mesmerized to the point of forgetting about filling their bellies. And yet, Jesus remembered. It's a good thing he was looking out for them when they weren't even looking out for themselves. He'll do that by the one. I know there are some believers here who can testify to the fact that there was a time in your life when you weren't looking out for yourself, and had it not been for the grace of the Lord Jesus, you wouldn't be here today. Well, that speaks to his compassion. Let's reread verses 2-3.

The last time we read a text similar to this was in 6:34. That text emphasizes a spiritual need, while this one refers to the people's physical needs. These two texts showcase complementary concerns of the Lord Jesus. He does indeed care for the entire person. The spiritual needs are certainly a priority and primary, which is evident when you study the ministry of the Lord Jesus. However, certain Christians throughout human history have failed to discern God's genuine concern for the whole person. The approach of siloing our compassion to only spiritual needs while showing no concern for a person's physical well-being is foreign to Jesus's ministry and the Bible in general. Again, we can take this too far, as some protestant liberals have, by equating feeding and clothing the needy as the Great Commission itself. It is not. The Great Commission is the call to

make disciples, which is the priority for the church. However, we must reject the pendulum swing extreme as well. The New Testament epistles attest to this as well.

*<sup>35</sup> In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"-Acts 20:35*

*<sup>27</sup> Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. -James 1:27*

So, we imitate Jesus when we holistically care for our neighbors. And Jesus does just that, by another miraculous feeding, which, of course, should remind you of what took place two chapters again with the feeding of the five thousand—this time, he feeds at least four thousand men with seven loaves of bread and a few fish. I'm sure you noticed the disciples acting brand new in verse 4. We'll revisit their forgetfulness in our second point this morning. For now, I'd like to turn our attention to verse 8.

Like in verse 42 of chapter 6, the people ate and were satisfied. This is the satisfaction that the King brings with his kingdom. As John Piper has stated, ““When we eat, we taste the emblem of our heavenly food, the Bread of Life.”

So, a spiritual reality is displayed within this miracle that meets the people's bodily needs. Only Jesus satisfies fully and truly. All other matter lacks the ontological substance to be able to satisfy. King Solomon has said that God has placed eternity into man's heart. Meaning there's an eternal itch that we're all seeking to scratch. The problem is, ever since our separation from Adam in the garden, we strive to fill the endless void in our hearts with temporal things that were never meant to satisfy us apart from the Lord Jesus. That eternal itch will never be scratched until you're reconciled to God the Father; only Jesus Christ makes that possible. After this miraculous feeding, Jesus and his disciples kept it moving, as will we. Let's consider our second point this morning: Cautioning and Scolding. Let's read verses 11-13.

So here we read of the spiritual deafness and blindness of Jesus' enemies, which is to be distinguished from his disciples' dullness. As we've already read, these religious leaders are guilty of the unpardonable sin. They've rejected the Holy Spirit's work through Jesus's ministry and attributed it to Satan! And here we find them putting the Lord Jesus to the test. To be clear, a request for a sign isn't always evil. We see examples of individuals in the OT who request a sign and aren't rebuked for doing so. The Lord specifically commanded Ahaz to ask him for a sign in Isaiah 7. However, in the

majority of instances, the request for a sign signifies disobedience by putting the Lord to the test.

The Pharisees demand that the Lord Jesus give them some sign from God the Father to validate his claims. But there are a few problems with this demand. First, we've already seen that no miracle or sign from Jesus is irrefutable by sinful humanity. We find ways to deny the truth. I alluded to this earlier, but at 3:22:

*<sup>22</sup> And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out the demons." -Mark 3:22*

What does Abraham tell the man in hell who wants to go back and warn his family?

*<sup>29</sup> But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' <sup>30</sup> And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' <sup>31</sup> He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'" -Luke 16:29-31*

*<sup>18</sup> For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' <sup>19</sup> The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds." -Matthew 11:18-19*

In other words, you can't make them happy! Because it's not a matter of what's out there but rather what's in here (our hearts). For a hard heart, no type of sign will be good enough. Prayerfully, this doesn't describe you here this morning.

The second problem is that the Pharisees are putting Jesus to the test. This places them in partnership with Satan, their father, the great tester/tempter. This is merely a diabolical repeat of Satan's temptation of Christ in the wilderness.

*<sup>5</sup> Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple <sup>6</sup> and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you," and "On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" <sup>7</sup> Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" -Matthew 4:5-7*

And if you know your Old Testament, this should remind you of the Israelites putting Yahweh to the test in the wilderness. Which in turn led to their judgment. This leads to the last and third problem with this request by the Pharisees. The Pharisees were under the impression that Jesus was the one under their judgment. Jesus deeply sighs

because of their hard-heartedness and turns away from them. He doesn't want them to think that he's under their judgment because, in actuality, they're under his!

Don't get this twisted. I know the cute pictures of Jesus that we're accustomed to seeing as Americans have us thinking we stand in a place to judge Jesus. We judge his ethics and standards as antiquated and erroneous. Like the Pharisees, we place ourselves in the judge's seat, putting Jesus to the test. But believe you me, when he returns, all of that will cease. We may have seen him as a lamb-like king in his first advent, but his second will reveal him as a lion-like king, and he will sit in the seat of judge, testing all of humanity.

*<sup>42</sup> And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. -Acts 10:42*

*<sup>31</sup> "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. <sup>32</sup> Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. -Matthew 25:31-32*

*<sup>22</sup> For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son...-John 5:22*

*<sup>31</sup> because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." -Acts 17:31*

So, Jesus turned his back on these religious leaders, signifying that he's not subject to their finite judgment, but they'll one day discover that they will stand before him. If you're here this morning and possess an attitude like the Pharisees, I implore you to repent. Consider the reaction of one of Jesus' disciples when standing before the glorified Savior.

*<sup>12</sup> Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, <sup>13</sup> and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. <sup>14</sup> The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, <sup>15</sup> his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. <sup>16</sup> In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. <sup>17</sup> When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. -Revelation 1:12-17a*

Many have said, “When I stand before God, I will have some words for him!” Really? Or will you fall before him as though dead? The only we can have confidence in before the judgment of him is being found clothed in his righteousness.

Now, let’s consider the disciples’ partial deafness and blindness. Let’s read verses 14-21. So, it begins with a caution. Leaven often symbolizes evil in the Bible. It can refer either to bad teaching or behavior. Here, Jesus warns them to beware of the evil of the Pharisees and Herod. Based on the context, he’s most likely referring to the leaven of demanding some kind of sign, as we already considered. Commentaries vary on what they believe Jesus refers to here by the “leaven of Herod.” Perhaps this is another reference to seeking a sign, and these two terms are meant to be interpreted synonymously. So, it could just be a type of Hebraic parallelism. Or perhaps he’s referring to the general hedonist life of the Romans. So, “Beware of the religious false teachers, but also beware of the pleasure-seeking lifestyle of Herod and the culture at large.” Either way, it’s clearly a spiritual truth he wants to relay to them. And they miss it.

Their mind was so focused on the material that they missed the spiritual. Again, as I stated earlier, God cares about the material and physical, but not at the expense of the spiritual. And the temptation for the disciples and us today is to completely miss eternal realities because we’re too focused on the here and now. I like what Kent Hughes says, “You may be twenty-five to thirty-five and feel that you and your physical environment are where it is. You eat pasta and yogurt, no fats, no junk. You may lavish yourself in designer labels. You work out regularly and transport your body in a \$60,000 sports car. But your reductionist way of thinking, which has shrunk you to a body and little more, will betray you. As the years go by, you will become more aware of your hollowness. When the skin begins to sag, and the clothes no longer look “right,” you may learn that ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’”

Perhaps you’re here this morning and haven’t grasped the weight of eternal spiritual truths. Maybe you believe life only consists of what you see with your physical eyes and feel with your body. Well, I’m here to tell you that the creator of life has spoken, and this isn’t all there is. Imagine if I were to spend all my time, energy, and money on accessories for a hotel room on a family vacation that I’d only be spending a week in. That would be short-sighted and foolish. Don’t do the same with your soul.

Or maybe you’re here as a Christian, but you, too, struggle with prioritizing spiritual realities in your life. I would ask you to consider this litmus test. Do you spend more time praying for a job promotion, physical health, and personal wants than you do praying for the spiritual maturity of the saints, the evangelization of the lost, and the glory of God to be revealed? If so, you’ve probably prioritized the material above the spiritual.

Do you spend more time debating others regarding political stances than sharing the gospel with the lost? Chances are your priorities are mixed up. Christian, what drives you? What compels you? What motivates you? What wakes you up in the morning? Is it the seeking first the kingdom of God? Or is it the transient things within this world? Perhaps you can discuss this over lunch after service. If you're more concerned with the material than the spiritual, you'll miss the lessons the Lord Jesus teaches, as with his disciples.

But there's another problem here, isn't there? Why would the disciples be worried about physical food when Jesus has already proven he meets all their needs, even supernaturally when needed!? Something has gone awry with their cerebral cortex. He just fed more than five thousand people and then more than four thousand with only a few pieces of bread! Did you forget who you're in the boat with!? But before we jump on them for their lack of remembrance regarding God's faithfulness, let's consider how this is the natural inclination of all people who dwell in the flesh, including us.

This was Israel's problem, particularly in the wilderness. They would grumble and complain, even after the Lord promised to meet all their needs. This is why God preemptively commanded the Israelites to perform certain rituals so that they would remember God's faithfulness for future trials. To quote Kent Hughes again, "There is no better shield against spiritual declension and weakness than Christian remembering."

Take the book of Joshua, for example. During the supernatural crossing of the Jordan, the priests were commanded to take twelve stones from the riverbed and place them in a mound in Gilgal as a memorial.

*<sup>6</sup> that this may be a sign among you. When your children ask in time to come, 'What do those stones mean to you?' <sup>7</sup> then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it passed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So these stones shall be to the people of Israel a memorial forever." -Joshua 4:6-7*

Yahweh, God doesn't want anyone to forget his past faithfulness because he knows he's dealing with people who are prone to forget. This was here so the people could rerun the mental tapes of that day in a time of adversity. Perhaps you need some stones in your own life. Ways to remember God's past faithfulness so that those memories can become fountains of power in your own life and others.

*<sup>11</sup> I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. <sup>12</sup> I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds. -Psalm 77:11-12*

I can definitely see myself in the reaction of these disciples. Time and time again, I'm filled with anxiety due to a circumstance in life, forgetting that the Lord has already proved himself over and over. How well are your spiritual camcorders working this morning, believer? Do you fold when faced with the waves or terror this life offers? Or do you remember how, in times past, the Lord has delivered you? As believers, we also have the privilege of drawing upon the remembrances contained in God's Word. This is our history! Remember how God caused Israel to cross the Red Sea supernaturally, how the sun stood still for Joshua, the raising of Lazarus, and Peter's miraculous deliverance from jail. Their history is ours because we serve the same God the old saints did. And if he was faithful to them, he'll be faithful to us.

And this is why we shouldn't allow what News stations tell us to alert us or cause us to live in fear. When everyone around us reacts as if the sky is falling, our response should be distinct. That's what Peter meant in the famous apologetic passage.

*<sup>14</sup> But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, <sup>15</sup> but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect...-1 Peter 3:14-15*

So, Jesus asks the disciples these questions about their sight and hearing. Again, this is a loving rebuke and not a total rejection like we see with the Pharisees. As a matter of fact, I believe this narrative is meant to show us how God is patient with his disciples and teaching them through his ministry. This leads us to our final point, "Christ, the Supreme." If they had remembered the supremacy of Christ, there would be no dullness of heart. The same is true of us today. Let's consider his supremacy as we read the bookends of this passage, which deals with Christ healing physical deafness and blindness. Let's read 7:31-37 and then 8:22-26 and consider them together.

In both of these passages, we see the compassionate humanity of Jesus on display. In verse 34, Jesus looks up to heaven and sighs as he prays. Dear friends, he is not ignorant of humanity's plight. "He has done all things well" is reminiscent of "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good." The Lord Jesus has seen how far humanity has fallen. He created all things good. No sickness, disease, wars, strain relationships, cancer, pain, or death, and now he's peering at a world that has been broken by sin. His coming into the flesh proves he's not indifferent towards what we experience.

*<sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. -Hebrews 5:15*



The creator has stepped onto the stage of the world he created, bringing a new creation. So, wherever he goes, he is undoing the effects of the fall. He does all things well because he's God! And wherever he goes, he's making all things new. He heals this man of his deafness. Literally, "the chain of his tongue was broken." Jesus came to bring liberty to every kind of captivity.

In the miracle of the blind man, we once again see the gentleness and kindness of the Lord Jesus. Imagine the scene of Jesus taking the man's hand, guiding him around obstacles, verbally directing him where to step and where not to, and steadying him when he stumbled. This man was being guided by God incarnate to safety. And then we see the two-phase miracle. Clearly, this wasn't because Jesus lacked the power to heal this man in one step. It's probably an allusion to the progression of Jesus, opening the eyes of his disciples gradually.

But this is what he does. This is who he is. So, the question this text has for us is the same one that Jesus had for his disciples. You have seen the signs. Do you not yet understand? Nonbeliever, acknowledge your spiritual deafness and blindness before the Lord that he may heal you. Believer, remember the one who we serve. Set your mind on the things above instead of those bound to the earth.

Let's pray.