

## No Turning Back: Living the surrendered life Lesson 9

“How many psychiatrists does it take to change a light bulb?” One – but the light bulb has to WANT to change... and it’s gonna take a long time.

This joke says something about how people change. It takes time and effort for people to change.

### Read Mark 7:31-37

Mark is a fascinating writer! **He takes two stories of healing that both involve spit!**

**And to be honest with you... it’s the spitting thing that really gets me.** I believe that if I could go back in time, knowing what I know now about God and Jesus and the disciples and the sophistication of the 21st. century, I think I could for the most part hang out with Jesus.

I could see me standing there with a big smile on my face as Jesus reached out and touched the unclean leper. I could see me cheering Jesus on as he allowed the bloody woman’s embrace to take healing power from him. I could see me taking a sigh of relief after hearing what Jesus’ interpretation of the Sabbath was. I could see me saluting his efforts to bring sinners, tax collectors and even those Gentiles to live under the one reign of God. I mean I could see me doing the **whowhowhowho** every time he broke through the boundaries that so many needed broken. Like when Jesus put the holy and purity codes back in their place and when he put human beings back in their place, I’d be the guy shouting “way to go Jesus!!! I’d follow you anywhere!

**But to be honest with you... that spitting thing really gets me, though!** You put spit on someone; you may as well call them a dog! This ultimate show of disrespect has lived for centuries as one of the most provocative ways of showing disrespect and disfavor to another. This is also true for the 21st. century as well. In fact, in our culture, the one spitting is looked at with as much disrespect as the one being showered on (so to speak).

**This spitting thing is looked at with such disgust** that many parents counsel their children that it should never be done publicly for any reason (unless of course you play baseball!). It seems to me that this is one of those purity regulations that Jesus should have kept in place. Especially knowing what we know today about saliva (the stuff conducts germs like metal conducts electricity!). It’s probably here that I would be tempted to encourage Peter, who seemed to have no problem advising the Messiah about how to be Messiah (8:32), to counsel Jesus a little bit about a better way to make his point and heal the blind man.

But as I think about this a little more I’m pretty certain that Jesus carefully planned this act out as well.

Did you notice in the healing story that Jesus gives the blind man his sight in two stages?

This is more than unusual-- it’s unique among Jesus’ recorded healing miracles. Typically speaking when Jesus heals-- BOOM! – they are healed, completely. No stages. But not this time...

This time Jesus puts spit on the man's eyes, and asks him "Do you see anything?"

He says, "I see people. They look like trees walking around." (indicating at that he probably had sight earlier in his life)

Jesus then needs to touch his eyes a second time, and his sight is completely restored.

Now I wonder... what's going on here? Why does Jesus need to do the healing in two stages?

Some Bible scholars suggest that the healing took place in two stages because the blind man had weak faith. If he had strong faith in Jesus, the healing could've been instantaneous. But his weak faith was a hindrance, and slowed down the healing process.

Some Bible students suggest that what caused this to be a two-stage miracle, is weak faith on the part of those in that area- Bethsaida. ...That the environment of unbelief was a hindrance to Christ's working in power. (You remember that earlier in the gospel of Mark, Jesus couldn't do many miracles in his hometown because of their unbelief).

I don't know if either one of these theories is true - I'm willing to grant the possibility--but I'm skeptical. There's nothing in this chapter that indicates weak faith on the part of the man or his friends or the other people in the area.

Whether or not these theories are true, here's one thing I believe is going on in this text. Although an actual story, the healing of a blind man is also a parable of sorts. It's a picture of where Jesus' disciples are-- at this point. It's a commentary on the level of understanding that Jesus' disciples have. And we have seen so far through most of Mark, that the disciples don't really get it. They don't really see clearly.

That's where the story of the blind man becomes clear - the blind man has been touched by Jesus (like the disciples) - but he can't see well (like the disciples). He needs a second touch from Jesus (like the disciples do) in order to see clearly!

The disciples need to be touched by Jesus! They need their sight restored. They need their hearing to be clear! They need their spiritual perception awakened! They're dull spiritually and they need their senses sharpened! They need to be touched by Jesus. They need a second touch.

Sometimes we can be pretty quick to think that we have God all figured out.

But God has proven that he works in a variety of ways. He doesn't always do the same thing. So we don't have him all figured out. We can't always put everything about God into neat little categories. He defies our categories at times.

But I haven't always believed this way. I used to believe that I had God for the most part--all figured out. I thought I could see pretty much everything I needed to about God. I believed that his works were always consistent and that God pretty much did things the same way all the time.

But now I know better. Now I think it's absurd to think that anyone has God figured out. God is

sovereign. God doesn't need our permission to do what he does. God just does what God does! And as we can see in today's story God does things in a lot of different ways.

I couldn't make this stuff up

When it is within God purposes, he will speak through a donkey (he's done it!).

**Numbers 22:1-7**

**Numbers 22:21-35**

Or when God needs to he can cause an ax head to float in water-- he did it!! (2 Kings 6:1-7)

Or he turn water to wine

Or turn water to blood.

When God chooses, he can even use spit in the process of curing a person...

The point is we can't put God in a box or a pigeonhole, or in our neat little categories, and we most certainly can't completely understand him because he is beyond our understanding. Because of our blindness, and short sightedness and our limitations as finite human beings, we see as through a dark glass.

So, if the disciples need a second touch from Jesus, what about us? Do we need a second touch from Jesus? Do we sometimes have eyes but fail to see and ears but fail to hear? Do we sometimes need our spiritual perception sharpened? Are our eyes made clear?

For the most part, I've been intentional in following Jesus for some 24 years now. Much of my following has been stumbling. I'm moved by how many times that we, like Jesus' disciples--just don't get it. How often are we spiritually dull?

**The story of the Sheriff at the Manchester Airport**

The significant thing I see in Mark is the people who are touched by Jesus and how these people are transformed. Lepers (1:40-45), tax collectors (2:14-15), a dead daughter of a grieving dad (5:21-24, 35-43), a bleeding Jewish woman (5:25-34), a grieving Gentile (7:24-30), a deaf man (7:31-37), and now this blind man in (8:22-26).

It's not just their touch with Jesus that makes a difference, but perhaps more importantly it is their belief that such touch from Jesus will make a difference.

There's a message in this for us. We too can have the touch of Jesus in our lives.

**This brings me back to this spit thing.** This kind of touch can be messy. Often times God's touch leads us to boundary breaking activity that wreaks havoc with our comfort zones and traditions. Perhaps that why the spit is highlighted so dramatically in the story that acts as a prelude to the more important story that follows.

**Mark 8:31-37 (Message)**

31He then began explaining things to them: "It is necessary that the Son of Man proceed to an ordeal

of suffering, be tried and found guilty by the elders, high priests, and religion scholars, be killed, and after three days rise up alive." 32He said this simply and clearly so they couldn't miss it.

But Peter grabbed him in protest. 33Turning and seeing his disciples wavering, wondering what to believe, Jesus confronted Peter. "Peter, get out of my way! Satan, get lost! You have no idea how God works."

34Calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, "Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat; I am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how. 35Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to saving yourself, your true self. 36What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you? 37What could you ever trade your soul for?"

It's in this story that Jesus shows the mess of a suffering Messiah. And it's messy enough that-- Peter will not stand for it! Peter (who also represents the disciples) rebukes Jesus because what Jesus has to say is way-to-stinking-messy. But Peter and the disciples miss the point. The messiness of his death is the inevitable result of a life ordered by God toward the goal of bringing all people under the one reign (rule), the Kingdom of God.

And what the disciples fail to see is that Jesus is ultimately directing them toward their own crosses. He is preparing them for his mission. And through that challenge Mark challenges us to engage in the same relationship with Jesus that will transform our lives as he leads us to our own crosses so that he can prepare us for his mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Jesus gives us sight, even little by little. His goal is to bring us from no sight, to partial sight, to perfect sight. He may take us as we are, but make no mistake, he will not leave us that way. Jesus journeys alongside us, touching us over and over again, nudging us forward to be more like him. He wants us follow him and be willing to have a second or third or fourth or fifth touch...the times do not matter, our being willing to constantly realign our lives with the Lord, that is what he wants from us.

And it seems to me that just like the blind man in Bethsaida, once we encounter this Jesus, there's no turning back.

When we live the surrendered life we live a life that is:

**Penitent.** The Christian life is, among other things, a life of repentance and the disciples show this need pretty clearly.

**Patient.** I've noticed that so many of us are like the disciples in this story... we haven't arrived yet. But Jesus is patient with his disciples and it looks like the disciples.

**Persistent. (Story of Jessika)** I can't promise God that I'll never sin. I can't promise God that I'll be perfect or even close - and you can't either. But we can, "Keep on keeping on". We can keep on putting one foot in front of the other. (Despite discouragements, people who disappoint us, and our failures) By God's grace, we can keep on walking and not give up!

Our call is: No turning back, live the surrendered life. This brings me back to the light bulb joke... to

live the way God is calling us to live-- you have to want to change, and it's going to take some time.

But take heart, we serve a God "who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen." (Ephesians 3:20-21)

Whoever has eyes, let them see.

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