Do You See Anything?
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Good evening. Good to see you all. We're continuing on in our series in Mark for this Sunday evening that Dr. Redd has begun and taken us through. Uh, I'll remind you that, as Dr Read has taught us through this book, he's reminded us on several occasions that Mark, as he is presenting to us Jesus Christ, he is showing us the Messiah, but has not yet told us that this is the Messiah. We know that that will come in the passage immediately following this one. This evening, whenever Peter confesses at Caesarea Philippi that Jesus is in fact the Christ. We know from other books of the of the Gospels that Matthew and Luke both tell us that Simon Barjona did not know this on account of his own understanding, but because of his father in heaven revealed that to him. But up until this point, we have seen Messiah do all the things that the Old Testament has told us to expect. Even in our passage tonight, we would be remiss if we did not have this one included as well. So I invite you now to turn with me to Mark's Gospel chapter eight, and we will read verse twenty two to twenty six together.

And they came to Bethsaida. Some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village. And when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, do you see anything? And he looked up and said, I see people, but they look like trees walking. And then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again, and he opened his eyes, and his sight was restored. And he saw everything clearly. And he sent him to his home, saying, do not even enter the village.

Well, I'm reminded on a regular basis of how blessed we are in the twenty first century to experience the advancements in medical technology and indeed, the medical field. While I won't do it here, I do think it would be a interesting survey and a testimony to our medical partners to consider how many of us have had our lives prolonged and sustained on the count of modern medicine. I think it's safe to say there's probably some of us in this room who would not still be here if we were born in another century. Indeed, the span of our life would be much shorter, and the quality of our physical being would be significantly less if it were not for modern medicine. And think with me just for a moment in of the innovations as it pertains to the field of ophthalmology as it pertains to our passage this evening, with the exception of glasses. Things like contacts and even Lasik surgery are relatively new innovations, things that generations prior to us perhaps would not have even imagined. I think it's safe to say that without these things, our situation today would probably be much different than it is right now. I wonder how many of us in this room are dependent upon things like glasses or contact lenses. Indeed, if we did not have these medical innovations, our lives may look a lot more like the man here in Bethsaida. And perhaps we would find ourselves looking to Jesus in a much more desperate way than perhaps we are apt to in our twenty first century. Well, our text this evening is fairly short, and a three point outline may prove unnecessary. And so what I'd like to do is just proceed one verse at a time, beginning again in verse twenty two. And they came to Bethsaida. Some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. The preceding sections, Jesus and the disciples have taken a few boat excursions around the Sea

of Galilee. After feeding the four thousand at the beginning of chapter eight. They got into the boat and they went over to the district of Dalmanutha. There were only there for a short while before they were confronted by the Pharisees, and then eventually got back into the boat and went to the other side. And then finally arriving, as they do here in the city of Bethsaida. Now, while this is the first time we've come to Bethsaida, in Mark's gospel, we would be incorrect to assume that this was the first time Jesus had ever been here. I think it's quite likely that Jesus and his disciples had actually engaged in quite a bit of ministry in this town, located on the northeast side of the Sea of Galilee. John's gospel actually records for us that three of Jesus's disciples were born and raised in this city, namely Peter, Andrew, and Philip, as John's Gospel tells us. And yet, even though these three disciples followed Jesus, we know that the city as a whole primarily rejected Jesus as the Messiah. We have parallel accounts in both Luke and Matthew of. Whenever Jesus sends out his disciples and even sends out the seventy two to engage in ministry across the area of Galilee. We know in Luke chapter ten that Jesus tells us a little bit about how this city responded to Jesus and responded to his disciples. And so Jesus says in Luke chapter ten, woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. Thus, we can surmise that Jesus and His disciples. Not only did they perform many mighty works and miracles in the city of Bethsaida, But they were resisted and they were met with much unbelief as a whole on the part of this city. And yet, what is so marvelous, marvelous is despite the city wide rejection of Jesus, we still see a few believing that Jesus is the Messiah. Notice what happens again in verse twenty two. And some people brought to him a blind man. Some people brought to him a blind man. Upon arriving in the city, Jesus and his disciples were greeted by a group of people bringing one of their friends. This opening scene has an exact parallel with the healing of the deaf man. At the end of chapter seven, a passage that SE Young preached on a few weeks ago. And there the group of friends brought to Jesus an individual and begged him to heal him. That individual was a man who had a speech impediment and was deaf. And yet we see the same posture from both that group of friends, as well as this group of friends. Here we are confronted with a group of friends bringing to Jesus a man in need of healing. Now, I think it would be wrong for us to assume that the passivity of this particular man, as well as the the deaf men as well. I think it would be wrong to assume that their passivity suggests some kind of disinterest in Jesus to heal them. No. Rather, I think the passivity of these individuals should heighten for us their utter need and dependence upon someone to bring them to Jesus. So notice especially their two actions. They are described as those who brought and begged. They brought. They brought their friend to Jesus. Now, some of you know I did not grow up here at Briarwood, but while I was in university at Auburn I would come usually during the summer, but sometimes during school breaks as well. And I remember Pastor Reeder going through a series titled Living a Lifestyle of Evangelism and Discipleship. And I believe either in that series or perhaps it was the following year. He also led a number of series called Project Andrew, which he described as bring them to Him. I remember that standing out to me as a young man. It's it's really that simple. Our task as those who trust in the Lord Jesus, we bring them to him. We invite Jesus Christ. And the conversations that we have with our fellows at work, or at the home, or in the school. We bring people to the Lord Jesus Christ, and we bring Jesus Christ into the conversation in which we

are having. And that's precisely the attitude of these two friends here in this passage. They are much like Andrew, a man who himself was also from this very city. They not only brought him to Jesus, they also begged him. They begged him to heal their friend. And they begged because they were desperate to see this man healed. And they knew that this man could resolve his blindness. Undoubtedly, at this point in the Gospels, they would have already seen or heard a number of Jesus's miracles. And so in faith, they bring this man to Jesus and ask for him to relieve his blindness. Now not only is this the case with Jesus as the Messiah performing a number of these miracles, but we're also taught all throughout the Old Testament to anticipate a coming Messiah who will effectively open the eyes of the blind. This act of opening blind eyes is most often attributed to God Himself. So Psalm one forty six says, the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. And even in Isaiah thirty five we are told, the anxious and the disheartened are encouraged with these words. Be strong, fear not. Behold, your God will come and save you. The eyes of the blind shall be open, and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. And that is precisely what we have seen Jesus do all throughout Mark's gospel, engage in a number of miracles of healing. In fulfillment of Isaiah thirty five, prophet Isaiah instructed his people to look for a Messiah to come who will accomplish these very things. And yet we are told that it is not only the Messiah Lord who opens the eyes of the blind. We are also told that the servant of the Lord from the book of Isaiah itself is also one who will open the eyes of the blind. Note in particular Isaiah forty two, verse seven behold, I am the Lord. I have called you. Singular to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out of the prison those who are bound. And from the prison those who sit in darkness. And so when we consider the ministry of Jesus. We are confronted with one who is not only demonstrating that he himself is the Son of God, but also the servant of the Lord. In both cases, he is doing exactly what the Old Testament told us he would do. And these friends know that this is the only one who can open the eyes of their blind friend. Now, perhaps to our surprise, Jesus next response is not to heal him immediately. I think that's what we would expect, certainly immediately to to Jesus. For Jesus to stretch out his hand, touch this particular man and heal him of his blindness. And yet that's not what we see him do. Instead, his first act is to take the blind man by the hand and lead him outside the city. Note verse twenty three and he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village. Now, on a very practical level, to me, such an action seems a bit cumbersome and even quite unnecessary. I would imagine that at this point, whenever Jesus takes him by the hand, maneuvers around through the city streets and eventually outside of the city, that the pace of this miracle story would slow down incredibly. And even more than that, perhaps such a maneuvering around a city like this and outside the city walls would prove a bit dangerous for this man who cannot see what's in front of him. And so we're left asking ourselves, why is it that Jesus decided to perform this miracle outside the city gates? Why is it that he decided to take him by the hand and lead him through the city and outside the walls. I think there are a couple of things we could say. For one, I think Jesus is training this man to depend upon him. He is showing this blind man that Jesus is trustworthy when he takes him by the hand and leads him through treacherous paths. He is communicating to him. I will be your guide. I will uphold you. I will strengthen you. I will make sure that you do not fall on the way. You can entrust yourself to me. I was in seminary. I had a group of friends, fellow students, who just

about every Sunday, would go out of their way to pick up a friend whom they had met while they lived in California. Uh, a blind man to bring him with them to church. It was an extraordinary testimony to me as I watched their faith and their kindness, as they tended to the needs of this blind man. And quite literally, like our passage here brought him to Jesus in the church. But I remember on a handful of occasions, actually standing in the parking lot, seeing them arrive, and I would watch my particular friend help this blind man out of the car and through the parking lot and eventually into the sanctuary. And that man in particular, was entirely dependent upon this man's grasp of him. He took him by the hand and led him out of the car, through the streets, into the sanctuary, just like Jesus is doing here. So I think at least one thing we would like to say is that Jesus is ensuring to this man that he is worthy of his trust, and he is strengthening his dependence upon him. This actually reminds me of a passage that we see again in Isaiah one that is descriptive of the suffering servant. Notice what it says about him. I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know, in paths that they have not known. I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I do, and I do not forsake them. Just as the servant of the Lord leads the blind here in Isaiah. So Jesus himself is leading the blind man in this particular case. And he also says, I will not forsake you. So I think that's one thing we could say as to why Jesus leads this man outside of the city. But I think there's a more theological reason we could give for this, namely, that the language of taking by the hand and leading outside the city is actually a word for word parallel that Jeremiah uses when he describes the exodus of Egypt in Jeremiah thirty one. He talks to his people and he says, Whenever God brought about the exodus, he took Israel by the hand and led them outside the city. And what we see Jesus doing here as the Son of God is precisely the exact same thing. Just as God took Israel by the hand and led her out of bondage and into the promised land, so also Jesus Christ, the Son of God, takes this blind beggar by the hand and leads him outside of the city and into Marvelous light. What we see here in this simple, short, brief story is a miniature version of the whole Exodus itself. Just as God led his people outside of Egypt. So now he is taking this blind man by the hand and leading him outside. And in fact, this is a picture of what we see Jesus doing throughout all of the Gospels. He is actually accomplishing, as he says, a second exodus. Earlier in Mark's gospel, we learned that Jesus said to his disciples, first, he has to bind the strong man, and then he may be able to plunder the strong man's house. And what we see Jesus doing throughout all of the gospel is binding the strong man and then precisely plundering his house. He is rescuing those who are lame, who are sick, who are blind, who are ill in need of salvation. Jesus himself is accomplishing an exodus far greater than the one we see in the book of Exodus. And that is precisely how we should understand Jesus's ministry, not least of which is here present in this particular story. But now, with just the setting in the background, let's look a little bit more at the miracle itself. It's quite peculiar and even finds some similarity with the healing miracle at the end of chapter seven. And yet some differences as well. But let's consider now the miracle itself. Verse twenty three. And when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, do you see anything? And he looked up and said, I see people, but they look like trees walking. And then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again, and he opened his eyes. His sight was restored and he saw everything clearly. When the previous passage, the end of chapter seven, we saw Jesus also using saliva to heal the deaf man with a speech impediment.

And I don't know if you were here whenever Pastor Park preached on that section, but I remember vividly in my mind him saying, at this point in the sermon, I know exactly what you're thinking. When we came to this verse, he said, I know all of you are thinking to yourself, ooh, that's disgusting. And you would think that Mark might put something like that only one time in the gospel. And yet we see him adding it again a second time. So even though it may be gross to us. Mark has an intention behind it. Mark clearly wanted to include it here in this passage again and while again. While the act of using saliva for medicinal medicinal purposes certainly is strange to our ears, we ought to remember that this would not have been that bizarre for those living in the first century context. Without going into all of the detail, it was commonly believed in the Greco-Roman and Jewish world that there was something powerful and even miraculous about spittle or saliva for medicinal purposes. There's a number of tracts and manuscripts and texts that specifically talk about miracles that occurred on account of the use of saliva. And yet, what we see here, another challenge that confronts us is not only the use of saliva in the miracle, but even a partial healing that takes place nowhere else in all of the Gospels has Jesus's miracle not worked immediately. And we've seen him engage in cases much more difficult with this casting out the demon possessed man in the gadarenes, or raising up the girl in Mark chapter five. And yet, what we see here is there seems to be some level of difficulty in this healing. Most of the resources I have read have particularly attributed this partial healing to the difficulty of the case. And yet I don't think that is so here. Just as I mentioned earlier, Jesus has engaged in much more difficult cases than the one here. So I think his reason for having a partial healing is actually something a little bit different. And I do think it is connected to his decision to use saliva in the healing of this particular man. So on the let me at least answer the question as to why this strange miracle and why this partial healing. Let me at least answer in two ways one very basic. And perhaps on the most basic level, I think what Jesus is showing us here after he applies spit to this particular man's eyes and it results in partial seeing. I think one of the things Jesus wants us to see here is that all of those superstitious ideas about the power and magic behind saliva are, in fact, ineffective. They are not the means by which God brings about healing. I think he is very clearly showing us and them that all of those superstitious beliefs about saliva do not, in fact, work. So immediately after Jesus applies the saliva and his hands on his eyes, he says to him, do you see anything? And we know immediately that his vision is anything but clear. There is some element where, um, it affected something, but not completely. It might have helped the situation, but it did not overall resolve the situation. And so I think that's one of the main things we should see here is that this isn't ultimately, um, Jesus's decision to use saliva. I think he is showing us that, um, the superstitions of the day are not actually effective in bringing about these miraculous healings. Jesus is no mere healer like the ones that they would have been accustomed to in their day. He is far greater. He is the Messiah himself. Now when whenever, say young spoke about the parallel passage in chapter seven, I remember him pointing out something similar. He also noted that Jesus spit in the deaf man's tongue. And then immediately after Jesus did this, he signaled to this deaf man by looking up to heaven that the power of the miracle comes from heaven and not from the saliva. And I think a similar thing seems to be going on here. Saliva is applied in the first case, but not the second. In the first case, when the saliva is applied, he is able to see something, but it is anything but clear. But when in the second case,

Jesus decides to lay his hands on his eyes and decide not to use saliva this time. Then we begin to see. His eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. Perhaps, perhaps Jesus is communicating to him. Your ability to see is not due to just a random miracle working healer. The only way your eyes can truly be opened is if the Messiah himself, the promised one from the Old Covenant, is the one who opens your eyes. And then he does so with the second laying on of hands. Now, this may be one practical reason as to why we see a partial and then complete healing, but I do think there's something more specific going on here that Jesus is intentionally trying to show his disciples at this point in the gospel. If you've been with us so far in this series, you've noted that Jesus has described his disciples as anything but clear sighted. More often than not, these disciples are actually described as those who are blind and without understanding. Throughout the last eight chapters, they have seen Jesus, and yet they lack the perception as to who he is. In some sense, we could say that the parable of this. Excuse me. The miracle of this particular blind man may indeed function as a parable, or a symbol, or a picture of something that Jesus is actually doing in the eyes of his disciples. And so noted. Note just a few things that Jesus has said about the disciples up until this point. After their eyes beheld, Jesus calmed the storm. In Mark chapter four, they respond to themselves, saying, who then is this? Who is this? Who can control the wind, the waves, and the seas? They are without understanding as to who this man is. And then also with the feeding miracles, we noted that in both times they are incredulous to the idea that Jesus is able to miraculously feed a multitude. They say to these themselves, how can we feed this great multitude with such little resources that we have, proving to themselves, proving to Jesus that they lack insight into who Jesus is? And also, most recently in our passage just before this one, the language of Jesus almost seems most stark. Notice what he says in verse seventeen. Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes. Do you not see. Having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember? And again in verse twenty twenty one, do you not yet understand? And then the boat ride comes to a close. The last thing they heard from Jesus. Do you not yet understand? But then what we see immediately after the performance of this miracle is there seems to be some form of light breaking through in the perception of the disciples. Prior to this point, there seemed to be some level of blindness and misunderstanding. And yet now, after this miracle, we seem to get a great deal of understanding from the eyes of the disciples. Notice how Jesus says in verse twenty seven, he went up to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, and on the way he asked his disciples, who do people say that I am? They told him, John the Baptist and others said, Elijah and others said one of the prophets. And then he asked them, but who do you say that I am? And Peter answered, you are the Christ. It seems to me that something has changed between the first eight chapters and now. Chapter eight twenty seven and following the disciples now have a clearer understanding as to who Jesus is. They are able to locate that this man is in fact the Messiah. This man is no ordinary healer who works wonders and miracles. Rather, this is the one the Old Testament told us to look for. And so perhaps when we evaluate this particular enigmatic miracle on its own, perhaps we could say to ourselves that this miracle was a sign not only for this particular man, but it was also a sign that he wanted the disciples to see. He wanted his disciples to see that he was the one who was bringing about complete vision, complete clarity, even from someone who had a partial understanding and vision. And so I think we could say that these this blind man's gradual insight is actually

paradigmatic of the disciples gradual insight of who Jesus Christ is. And yet we know, too, that even as we progress through the Gospels, that it doesn't necessarily mean that the disciples immediately have completely clear vision as to who Jesus is and why he came. No, we know that immediately after this section, when Jesus foretells his death and resurrection, Peter takes him to the side and rebukes him. And so there's still seems to be, even in this moment, at this point in the gospel, some level of misunderstanding on the part of the disciples. And so I think one of the things that we're supposed to see here is that this is indicative of the time before the resurrection of Jesus Christ and before the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Perception into the the the person and character of Jesus Christ, the Messiah was in fact more blurry before the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. And so notice how different Peter is here in this section. And then after the day of Pentecost, when he gives his sermon, everything in that moment is crystal clear for the apostle Peter. He knows this is the Messiah that the Old Testament has told us about. No more unclear vision on the part of the disciples. I do want to mention, at least by way of application, one caution in that vein, I think sometimes this text can be taken as to mean that Jesus is in the business of having two touch theology, or what we might call second enlightenment theology, that there are some people in the church who are in the state of this blind man who see, but not clearly. But there are other people in the church who have been touched by Jesus in a different way. And now they see more clearly and have more knowledge and insight than the rest of the people in the congregation. To caution you against such an interpretation, I do not think that is helpful. Moreover, I think it is more helpful to understand this, as this is indicative of the times in which they lived prior to the descent of the Holy Spirit, prior to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The mystery of the Gospel of Jesus Christ was not entirely clear at this point in history. And yet, when the Holy Spirit comes upon Peter and the disciples, things get miraculously clarified. I think one of the final and main points that we are meant to see here is that Jesus's decision is act to heal. This particular blind man is indicative of the kind of spiritual insight that he is bringing about in all of his people. Just as John Newton said in his well-known hymn, I Once Was Blind, but now I see. All of us would readily admit that at one point in our lives we too were blind. No different from the disciples here, unable to see and understand that Jesus Christ is the Messiah. Perhaps it was vague to us that the Son of Man could also be the Son of God. Perhaps it was surprising and incredulous, incredulous of us to believe that this man could in fact be the suffering servant of the Lord. And yet, when the Holy Spirit came upon our lives, gave us eyes to see, then we were able to readily see and confess that this man is in fact the Messiah. And in fact, I think we could go so far as to say that it is so clear, just as it is from the man in verse twenty five of chapter eight, after he had been touched by Jesus a second time. His vision was clarified. And so likewise, when the Holy Spirit changes our hearts and gives us eyes to see, we too have a spiritual understanding as to who Jesus is. So with that in mind, let me close us in prayer. Please pray with me.