

Spiritual Blindness

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[0 : 0 0] Now, can we return this evening to Mark chapter 10 for a little while? And if you're beginning to get this, the kind of, the way this book works, the way this Mark is presenting Jesus, and what I want you to just move away from a little bit today is Mark, and move a little bit towards reminding, being reminded that it's God through Mark who's speaking. So it's not, you know, we're not looking at a human being's personal kind of angle on Jesus. This is, what is God doing is really the question I want to do in this chapter. What is God doing through Mark as he brings us this further description of Jesus?

Well, I believe what very often the scripture is doing, and maybe particularly what God is doing here through Mark, is to stop us in our tracks. You know, the great awfulness of preaching can sometimes be that it's, it's, it's so horrific, it puts people to sleep.

The moment I start, your brain goes into atrophy and stops listening. You know, that, that, or not just me to anyone, that there's this, there's this something deep inside that stops being challenged or listening or moving under God. And I think God's word, and they might not just be preaching, it might be when we open the Bible, you know, can open any other book and pooh, it's just full of life. There's things flying out of the pages. We come to the Bible and it's just dusty and dry and we stop listening because that's part of the battle, isn't it, of sin? It's part of the battle that, that rages with us spiritually.

But his word is really too much of it, and this is kind of unpopular thinking today, I think, is to stop us in our tracks. It's not just to rub us on the back. They're there.

It's not just to give us a good feeling about ourselves. It is sometimes to stop us in our tracks and convict us of our shameful living and convict us that we need Jesus Christ.

[2 : 1 7] It is to challenge us then to draw us to Jesus. That is what the Bible is all about. Draw us what to, yes, to His redeeming love. Draw us to His embrace. Draw us to His divinity.

Draw us to His lordship. Draw us into worship, into adoration, not just for the hour, but so that we take our steps out of the building as worshipful steps and the decisions we make are worshipful decisions and the conversations we have are worshipful ones and the lives we lead are worshipful because of Jesus Christ and what He's done. His word says, look, I've created you, but you've rebelled your first parents and everyone since. You're dead to me in relationship. Dead, but I love you. I want you back. You're powerless to return, but I want you to see you need me, both in salvation but also in discipleship. I remind you the great commission is to draw people into being followers of Jesus, not just believing but following Jesus. So both in terms of salvation and discipleship, the Bible takes us to the place where we are saying, look, I need you. I need you today. I've been a Christian for 40, 50 years, but I need you today. I need you in my life. I need your spirit. I need your grace. And so often I think the battle is that we're blind to that. We're blind to our need and we stand firmly on the foundation of our own self-reliance. And that can be as true for us, truer for us as Christians maybe than anyone else sometimes. Jesus is hugely radical and He is rattling our cages in this chapter and I hope that He'll rattle your cage to draw you to Himself in all His love and all His grace. Please remember that He's speaking here into the culture of His day and He speaks about children and

He speaks about morality and He speaks about divorce and marriage. He speaks about His own crucifixion and He speaks about the themes of the kingdom of God, all really important for us today. But in the culture of His day, we need to, I think it's important sometimes for us to remember that as He speaks into because He's shaking their thinking. He's shaking the religious people's thinking and He's shaking the thinking of His hearers and their thinking is molded by the culture that they live in, just as ours is, all of us, every one of us. And so He wants to shake that because ultimately He wants us to have a Christ culture in our thinking and His culture to be what molds and moves us. So

He's speaking into this culture where marriage was throw away, talking about divorce but marriage was throw away. It was easy to get divorced in certain circles in Palestine and they kind of twisted and manipulated God's law so that a man, I've said this before, a man could choose to divorce his wife if she'd burnt his dinner too much. So it was kind of easy, it was throw away. They'd taken God's law and they'd abused it and twisted it so that it could become something that really they justified it and it was easy for them. Children were generally to be seen and not heard and weren't really significant and important, although the reality of children in a family was important, of course. And probably most importantly moral obedience was seen to be the way to get to heaven, the good guy, the rich young ruler. Now when Jesus said it's impossible for the rich, it was very hard for the rich to enter the kingdom, the disciples say, what? Well who can be saved if this guy can't get saved? Because he was moral, he was upright, he was blessed, he was rich, he was a ruler, he had authority and that was all signs in that society of God's blessing.

God will bless the rich young ruler guys and girls. They're the ones that have God's favor and they've kept the laws of God as much as they can and they'll get to heaven. Moralism really was very much the order of the day. And I'm not sure if our society is terribly different to that in some of these issues, in some of these areas. Marriage too, well we know all about marriage don't we? In some ways we're tired of hearing about it. In these last few weeks and months. And at the conference we were at this week, Steve Timmis was speaking and he spoke about the twin reasons for people getting married today very often, were to satisfy erotic attraction and to satisfy emotional attention. And that that's all that consisted of. And when these things go then marriage can be ditched and thrown away. And it can be thrown away, it can be selfish, it can be different from God's model and God's pattern. And also we'll say a little bit more about that later. But children, well children maybe have more rights in today's society than they did in Palestine. But nonetheless children often become great victims don't they? They're not considered often in family break up. They are often the ones that are broken and hurt most by the dissolution of the family unit. Worst of all, worst of all, can I say it? Am I allowed to mention this today? They're an inconvenience. They're a mistake that can be surgically removed before they see the light of day. Cheapened. Not regarded as human. Taken from the womb. And

God also in the same way as seen similarly in a sense to the way he was being seen here. The one who rewards moralism, the rich young ruler, who rewards the people who do their best, who are good or moral or upright, who are good citizens. And he's the kind of God who rewards that. And even in the attitude a little bit of the disciples when they say to Jesus, we want you to do for us whatever we ask. That's often our view of Jesus Christ and even as believers. We just really want you to be our great big Santa Claus figure.

[9 : 15] We'll do for us what we ask. And then we become hugely rebellious and unhappy when things go terribly wrong for us. And we wonder about death and we wonder about loss. And we wonder, well, if that family lose their child, what's the point of their faith? What's the point of believing in God? So the societies are not dissimilar, are they? And the cultures and the thinking are not dissimilar. But Jesus aims a verbal broadside into that whole way of thinking. And the truth for us often hurts, doesn't it? It hurts, but it leads to healing.

And you know, whether we choose to accept the truth or not doesn't change the truth. And the reality of that truth. But we look for the truth to convict us to drive us in need and recognizing his grace and his love towards him, which we'll talk about. But can I just say one or two things about what Jesus says here? In response. There's really far too much in this chapter to deal with in a half hour sermon. Just throwing out one or two brief pointers. There's questions that you have for the city groups on Wednesday, which you can unpack or you can look at if there's any other things from this you can take and visit the city groups then take and ask these questions. But Jesus, when he's asked about divorce, he speaks about marriage. And he says that really marriage on his terms is not up for discussion. And we know that society has changed today. And we know that society is in the midst of redefining marriage at a very fundamental basic level. Same sex marriage is very much in the news at the moment. But God doesn't, and I say this with all compassion, and I hope with respect and gentleness, God doesn't recognize the changes that society are making, nor the redefinition or the rethinking around marriage. And nor as believers should we. We submit to what Jesus is reemphasizing here in this passage, that from day one, marriage is a reflection of the community of God. That man and woman made in God's image, man and woman together reflect that community man, not good man to be alone. So there's this basic fundamental community

relationship of marriage that can be broadened into a wider community of society, which is a reflection of the character nature of God, man and woman together with her complementary natures. And characters and beings come together and reflect God in marriage as he says here from the beginning. A lifelong, faithful covenant from which children and society is to come. That's God's model, that's God's pattern. The reality of course is quite different. We live in a sinful, broken world where every family, every community, every situation is affected by sin and we recognize that. And Jesus and Mark recognize in Matthew's Gospel, we're told that he recognizes that as well because the hardness of our hearts, the allowed divorce for adultery were that the basic fundamental marriage relationship was broken. We recognize that. We recognize that there's forgiveness. We recognize that it doesn't work out. We recognize that people are hurting. We recognize that here there are people who are divorced, people who are separated, people who are struggling. We recognize that, but it doesn't change the fundamental reality of God's model and God's pattern, God's ideal that we are to work towards. Sometimes we know it doesn't happen, but we pray for God's help. And as I said earlier, that we need God in that. We need God to take us through that and we need his forgiveness and his grace and often we need a new beginning. Marriage is not for discussion. Children also are precious to Jesus. You know, in that second section where interestingly, you know, it's like a church situation and the disciples are indignant that the children are being brought to Jesus. They can't be bothered with the children, you know. You know, I want to come to church with some good, heavy theological teaching. I can't be bothered with children getting in the way, you know, and their noise and their immaturity and they're just a pain in the neck. That's what the disciples were saying. Jesus says, no, that's not how we regard them. Give them time. Value them. Love them your own or others in the Christian community. Parents in the home pray for your children.

[14:32] Give them time. Spend time with them. We so often fail to do that in our lives. We don't regard them as significant and important enough to be modelled, to be taught to spend time with so that they can imitate us. In the church, we spend time with our children. Isn't it great having them up here today? It's great. It's great that they are part of what we do. We don't put them to kids' church to get them out of the way into it because they're annoying. Let's get them out of their place. They're there because they learn at their own level when they come in and we want them to be part of this morning. We want them part of the evening. We love when they come to a city group and we can do worship with them there and sing with them or pray with them. We recognise too to pray against the rejection of the significance of children in our society. We must pray for the most vulnerable of all of us in society. As churches, as Christians, we believe in protecting the rights of those who have least rights, those who are poorest, those who don't have what we have. We'll stand up for them because nobody else will. Nobody's interested in them. It's just not in polite company to talk about abortion and to talk about the needs of the unborn. But who will speak up for them with compassion and with respect because they have no voice? And spiritually,

Jesus recognises the significance of children, their trust, their need, their vulnerability. And he wants us spiritually to see that in the Kingdom we're to be like that too, with trust, Jesus, needy, needing fed, vulnerable learning. So he aims these broadsides at some of the thinking of the day and then he finds all in his work. In what he's come to do, real life he says comes through death. That's what he does is he, for the third time, predicts his death in this small section. We've looked at the other two before. He speaks about death and he speaks about resurrection and he speaks about coming to serve, not to be served, to give his life a ransom for many. And he comes to speak about his crucifixion and his resurrection again, radical and shocking truth. And he kind of is, I think, or mark through the way the Gospel is going. He's nailing what he said in chapter 8 and verse 35 where he says, you know, for whoever wants to save his life will lose it. Whoever loses his life for me in the Gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain a whole world? The end loses so. He's talking about the first being the last. He's inverting the whole order. He's saying the rich young man's a great young guy, but he's lost because his heart is not for following Jesus. His heart is on the pursuit of wealth and that's hard to change. He's such a powerful idol. He says the models of society are not the models that Jesus has. The good going church people are not necessarily the people that come to faith in Jesus Christ because it's not about morality and being good and offering to God what we can. Look at me, what I'm giving. It's about recognizing our need, being convicted and shamed by our sinful selfishness and coming

to the cross in our knees and accepting what Jesus has done on our behalf. Heaven isn't going to be in our terms. We don't come to God with our requests and say, okay, this is if you give me that. It's not like that. It's we come as empty and naked before God morally in spirituality and I need you. You know, the oldest Christian here doesn't move on from that. Moves to that place of continued and even deeper need. Probably the more we go on as Christians, the darker we see our hearts as being. The deeper our need is and the more dependent we have to become. And he wants us to, as he says, follow him. As he says to the rich man in verse 21, give up what you have, one thing you lack, then come and follow me. Isn't that unbelievable truth? Is that we follow him. We don't come with anything. We don't offer anything. We get rid of anything that we think we have that merits favor from him and we simply follow him and that goes on in our Christian life. Tim Keller is a great quote in that little book that I mentioned last week. He says, in Christ, now listen to this and take it on board and meditate on it, digest it. It's very short. In Christ, we get the verdict before the performance. Take that and think about that. In Christ, we get the verdict before the performance. The rich man wanted to give his performance to God and say, now do you accept me? The Christian says, please accept me because of what Jesus has done.

And then we serve as a result of the verdict being that we are forgiven, that we are made clean, that we are covered in the righteousness, not our own, but of Jesus clothed. How could we come? We go clothed in his righteousness because of what he has done, taking our sin upon himself on the cross. And so the cost then, the performance that we offer is in gratitude for what we've been gifted. It's in recognizing the association we must have with Jesus Christ. Now that's the gospel, isn't it? You've heard it a million times here. You say, I'm actually there. I'm quite tired of hearing it. But Jesus reminds us here that the disciples got it wrong, the rich man got it wrong, James and John, they got it wrong. And Jesus knows our hearts and he's challenging the foundation about our hearts, about our self-centeredness, our pride, our longing just to really be lords of our own lives. And he's challenging that. And maybe as we're unfolding this chapter, as you're reading it, you feel resentful spirit kind of building up within you. You might be angry, you won't write, what right is God, or what right is Derek, or what right is the

[21 : 52] Bible? It's typical. Anger's welling up within you. You can't see the love of Jesus. You can't see that he is convicting in order to bring us to that place of humble need where we will accept this gift. You know, in any other walk in life, you don't need to be convinced to accept a gift. You know, generally speaking, move away from cynicism and cheating and people playing tricks. I don't mean that. Someone offers you a great gift. You generally don't need the giver to persuade you to take it. So gift of salvation is different, isn't it?

Because we need persuaded. Why is that? Because we find it hard to believe that we can't offer God anything in regards to our salvation and that we are so desperately needy. We hate that sense of need and vulnerability. But he says, well, that is how it is. And we're blind to that. We say, but God, you must accept that. I've been in the free church for 50 years. You've got to accept that. There's got to be something in that. I've tried my best. I've been a good father, a good mother, a good parent, a good worker. You've got to accept that. I know the Bible, you have to accept these things. But he says, I see your heart and I see the motives and I see what isn't there and the lostness and the sin that needs to be dealt with. And he says, we can be blind to that. And so I close with just the illustration of Bartimaeus, the chapter. And I want to just apply that spiritually. Now, Jesus asks Bartimaeus an amazing question. He says, what do you want from me? What do you want me to do for you? It's not an amazing question. Amazing question. Now, in your spiritual life, can I get you to hear Jesus saying the same thing with regard to your soul? What do you want? What do you want from me? What is it you would ask? What would you ask for your spiritual life? If Jesus is here today and he says, what is it that you want me to do for you? I don't know what your answer to that is, but I'm telling you the best answer.

The best answer is the one that Bartimaeus gave Lord, I want to see. I want to see. And that is my prayer for myself. It's my request to God. And it's my hope that you will ask that question. She sin blinds us to our need and to his glory and to salvation, blinds us to the battle that we face, blinds us to the reality of his truth, blinds us to the ugliness of sin, our selfishness, our ingratitude, the horrors that are unpacking around us, blinds us to these things, blinds us to the sense of shame that we should sometimes feel that what we take from God, we lap, receive and take from God without a blind bit of thanksgiving and gratitude. But above all, if we reject or ignore or take lightly his crucifixion and the cost of his salvation for us, that's the most ugly reality of sin is that we cheapen

the cross and the crucifixion and the reality of what he has done for us. You know, he says, when the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life a ransom for many, that's what he has come to do. He has come. God in heaven has come to serve a fallen and broken world to bring salvation to you and his self-denying love, his patience and his gifts, his finished works and his forgiveness and his Holy Spirit provision and the inheritance that we have in the glory of eternity. Hard though that for some people today will be to understand and I don't for a moment belittle the pain and suffering of those who have lost unnaturally, parents burying their children, the most awful reality. But nonetheless, their comfort that was spoken by another parent who lost his son in a car crash, who was one of my best friends, said to all the young boys who were there, young men who were there,

Jesus can be your forever friend. And that reality is what reminds us impossible for us to see naturally. Make your prayer to God, if you can't see these things today, I want to see. I need you. Help me to see your love and your grace and your salvation and that gift is free and true forever. Amen.