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# Following True Greatness

## Mark 8:22-38

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**Introduction** This morning we considered Mark 10-11 and noticed that Jesus commands his people to see true greatness that is dressed in terrible suffering. In that message we were confronted with the truth that *seeing true greatness happens not when it is measured by human standards (the Twelve) but when it is seen through the eyes of faith* (Bartimaeus).

Tonight we continue our study of seeing true greatness by thinking together on a parallel passage to this morning's text.

Similarities with this morning's text

1. Jesus' concern over "seeing" (8:18; 10:33)
2. Jesus' healing of a blind man (8:22ff; 10:46ff)
3. Jesus' disciples somewhat seeing but not yet fully (8:27ff; 10:35ff)
4. Jesus' passion not prized (8:32ff; 10:33ff)
5. Jesus' miracle needed to see everything clearly (8:25; 10:52)

As we move now to the passage for tonight, here are some ways of saying the message. What follows are concentrated sentences that are an attempt to package the entire message.

Summaries of tonight's message

1. *One cannot see the beauty of the Christ without understanding the brutality of the Cross.*
2. *The message of the cross is central to the mission of the Christ.*
3. *Christ will not offer himself to anyone as a crossless Christ.*
4. *The nature of true discipleship is living the cross-centered life.*
5. *One cannot have the Christ without having the cross.*

To notice this concept let's consider its context. As you read this gospel I think you would conclude with me that the turning point of the gospel is found in this passage (v.22-38). Jesus mostly through his actions has been slowly unveiling His identity as the Servant who is the Messiah. Now and to the end of the gospel we read Mark's account that Jesus is the suffering servant. He depicts the true nature of his greatness by revealing the true nature of his servanthood. Those who see it will follow him. Those who want another Christ will stop following him. At this point in Mark's gospel we come to an understanding of true discipleship. What are necessities for following true greatness?

## Following true greatness

As Jesus and his disciples come to Bethsaida, Jesus performs a two-part healing of a blind man. Picking up the storyline in v.22, listen by faith as I read God's word (22-33).

### Remembers the rescue

v.22-23a

The first necessity for following true greatness can be noticed in what Jesus did for the blind man. Jesus led the blind man out of the town (23) and forbid him to go back into the town (26). This action served as a witness against Bethsaida's unbelief (cf. 8:11-13) and a sign that this man was delivered from destruction. The blind man was led by the hand out of a place on which God's judgment was coming. This sounds familiar to another man who by his hand God led him out of his town on which God rained sulfur and fire (Gen.19:16). He too was not permitted to go back or even look back to his old town/life.

Following true greatness has a strong sense of being delivered from destruction. True discipleship understands that when we were delivered from the realm of the old we must not go back to the old (Lk.9:62; 17:32; Col.3:5-17). Remember the rescue!

### Requires a massive miracle

v.23b-30

Leading the blind man out of town also gave Jesus an opportunity to provide a specific object lesson for his disciples. The lesson was in the healing process. Jesus took two steps to heal the man.

This sets up the stage on which Peter's confession (27-30) can be understood. The disciples come to embrace Jesus as the Christ (miracle part one) but they want him without the cross (miracle part two). Notice that after Jesus reveals his true identity as the Messiah (27-29) he commanded his disciples to be silent about his identity (30). Now why would he do that?

Unlike the crowds who didn't know his identity (28), his disciples did. But their understanding of the nature of the Messiah and the nature of discipleship was not yet fully shaped. They were still somewhat seeing but not yet fully seeing. Their idea of the Messiah was governed by other sources. Perhaps it was first century Judaism and their tradition. Perhaps it was also their expectations; namely that the Christ is to be a warrior who will without delay destroy evil (i.e. Nero and Rome) and restore the fallen throne of David and his Temple.

Following true greatness requires a massive miracle that allows the heart to see not merely the identity of the Messiah. The eyes of faith will also see the mission of the Messiah. Suffering is not merely to be endured. Suffering is to be embraced. And this counter-cultural / counter-natural conviction comes from (requires) a massive miracle.

### Readily needs a rebuke

v.31- 33

As we read on, our interpretation of the healing of the blind man is confirmed. We come to Jesus' rebuke of Peter. We come to another necessity for following true greatness. Jesus identity (The Messiah) and the nature of his Messiahship (suffering) had to unite in the hearts of his disciples in order for the mission of Jesus Christ to reach its full scope; to the ends of the Earth. To preach a crossless Christ to the ends

of the Earth would destroy the gospel and its purpose. That message will not save people. That message will not glorify Christ. To accept a half truth (Jesus is the Christ) as a full truth (A Christ that does not bear the cross) gives birth to hearsay. Following true greatness not only requires a massive miracle in order for his disciples to see the means of Christ's mission; namely the cross. Following true greatness readily needs a rebuke.

In v.31-33 we hear Jesus foretelling his death and resurrection. V.32 tells us that he said this plainly. This verse clues the reader to the fact that the problem with not understanding Jesus' teaching is not with Jesus. The problem is hard-heartedness (cf. 8:17). Notice a characteristic of a heart that is hardened.

Peter listened to Jesus speak on his passion (i.e. death, burial and resurrection). Peter wants something better / easier / a bit more comforting. He takes Jesus aside and rebukes Him. Jesus perceives that Peter's mind (i.e. heart) is not attuned with the Messiah's mission. Rather it is in cahoots with Satan's mission.

Jesus interprets this exchange for us. "Setting the mind on the things of man" corresponds with satanic activity and purpose. "Setting the mind on the things of God" must correspond with Jesus' teaching of the cross. In other words, Satan wants to stop Cross-like teaching and Cross-like living. To do this he will tempt God's people to suggest that the church can grow and move forward in ways that do not require serving and suffering.

Oh, how many times, beloved, do we want Christ and ease? Loving Jesus with no difficulty is Satan's way of snuffing out the Cross. Christ Jesus loves God's mission too much to allow His people to entertain Satan's strategy. Following true greatness readily needs a rebuke.

### Relates to all of us

### v.34-38

Jesus followed up his rebuke with a lesson on true discipleship (34-38). This lesson underscores a staggering reminder. The nature of true discipleship does not merely apply to leaders. It applies to all who profess Christ as their savior. Nobody can say that they have Christ but are unwilling to suffer for him. Jesus Christ does not give himself to one who wants a crossless Christ.

There is no warrant for assurance of salvation to anyone who is ashamed to publicly identify with Jesus and the gospel (38), who tries to work their way to heaven through penance (37), who will not sacrificially give of their treasures because they do not see Jesus as their treasure (36), who is more interested in protecting their family instead of promoting risk-taking ministry (35), whose interests are self-serving and not self-denying (34) and/or who is more afraid of dying because of the cause of Christ rather than dying due to God's wrath (34).

Jesus taught that *the nature of true discipleship is living the cross-centered life*. To receive Christ is to bear His cross. Following true greatness relates to all of us.

We've been presented with something of the true nature of the Messiah and his followers in Mark 8:22-38. We heard that the message of the cross is central to the mission of the Christ. But having eyes do you not see and having ears do you not hear?

**Conclusion***Following true greatness*

- *Remembers the rescue*
- *Requires a massive miracle*
- *Readily needs a rebuke*
  - *Relates to all of us*

*Count the cost and come; follow Christ on the road of suffering  
that leads to the realm of glory.*