

[11 : 43] I possibly won't be in this life then, because I'm getting old. But that doesn't matter. It's what shapes your life. And I'd like to think that there will be one influence in your life other than anything else.

That the Bible and the Lord Jesus Christ would be at the center of your life, molding the way that you think, the way that you act, the way that you behave to others in life, and the way that you speak to them.

Just as the water bent these planks of the stream, so the word of God can bend and shape your life and mine so that we become like Jesus.

Thank you for your listening. Let us again sing to God's praise from Psalm 119 and at verse 17, that's page 401, if you're looking at the psalm book.

If not, focus on the screen. with me, thy servant, in thy grace, deal bountifully, Lord, that by thy favor I may live and duly keep thy word.

[13 : 12] From verse 17 down to the verse Mark 22, with me, thy servant, in thy grace, deal bountifully, Lord.

With me, thy servant, in thy grace, deal bountifully, Lord, that by thy favor I may live and duly keep thy word.

Open my eyes that of thy law the wonders I may see.

I am a stranger upon this earth hide not thy laws from me.

My soul within me breaks and does but strange things still endure true longing that it hath all times unto thy judgments pure.

[14 : 54] Thou hast rebuked the cursed proud who from thy precepts swear.

Read, read, good chance shape removed from me for I thy laws observe.

let us now read from the word of God from the New Testament scriptures from the gospel according to Mark chapter 8 and from verse 11.

The Pharisees came and began to argue with him that is with Jesus seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him and he sighed deeply in his spirit and said why does this generation seek a sign truly I say to you no sign will be given to this generation and he left them got into the boat again and went to the other side now they had forgotten to bring bread and they had only one loaf with them in the boat to caution them saying watch out beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod and they began discussing with one another the fact that they had no bread and Jesus aware of this said to them why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread do you not yet perceive or understand are your hearts hardened having eyes do you not see and having ears do you not hear and do you not remember when

I broke the five loaves for the five thousand how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up they said to him twelve and the seven for the four thousand how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up and they said to him seven and he said to them do you not yet understand and they came to Beth Sida and some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him and he took the blind man by the hand 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 looked like trees walking then

[18 : 10] Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again and he opened his eyes his sight was restored and he saw everything clearly and he sent him to his home saying do not even enter the village amen and may God bless to us that reading from his truth now at this stage in the service there is a Gaelic singing we're going to sing from psalm 145 two verses at verse 5 but I'll read them in English for the benefit of those who may not have the Gaelic language I of thy glorious majesty the honor will record I'll speak of all thy mighty!

works which wondrous are O Lord men of thine acts the might shall show thine acts the dreadful are and I thy glory to advance thy greatness will declare in Gaelic at verse 5 O remain seated for the Gaelic singing

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[23 : 54] Some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. Matthew's Gospel tells of the occasion when an imprisoned John the Baptist sent his disciples to Jesus with a question.

The question was, are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another? And leaving aside what may have given rise to the question in the mind of John the Baptist, do you remember the response of Jesus?

Jesus answered them, go and tell John what you hear and see. The blind receive their sight. The lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear. The dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me. The very first mark that Jesus gave to substantiate his identity, his claim, was the blind receive their sight.

[25 : 18] And you know, reading this morning, Jesus remonstrates with his disciples about their need to sharpen their vision.

Having eyes, he says, do you not see? They were a group of people, as you know, who were repeatedly exposed to the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But they were slow to put it into practice. Perhaps that is a reflection on ourselves too.

How often we're required to be taught the same lesson. We also need to have more clarity of spiritual vision.

And to illustrate and reinforce his teaching, the Lord opens the eyes of those who were blind. There are several examples highlighted throughout the ministry of Jesus.

[26 : 22] And in our text this morning, Mark records for us how one blind man received his sight at Bethsaida.

This miracle, which is only recorded by the gospel writer Mark, has some very peculiar features. Some of these features, it shares with one other of our Lord's miracles, which incidentally is only found in Mark's gospel too, and which occurred nearly around the same time.

The miracle of the healing of the deaf and dumb man. It is recorded in chapter 7 of this gospel. Both of these miracles have points in common.

The Lord took the person apart, worked his miracle in privacy. In both, there is an abundant use of the same singular means.

Our Lord's touch and the saliva upon his finger. And in both, there was an urgent command given, that they keep secret what had taken place in their lives.

[27 : 46] But this miracle, that I want to focus on with you for a few moments, had another peculiarity, in which it stands absolutely alone.

And that is, that Jesus performed the work in stages. You could say, that in many ways, it is one of the most remarkable of all the miracles, ever performed by the Lord Jesus Christ.

As I said already, we have other examples in the Bible of blind people given sight, but not in the way in which this man was given sight.

In other instances, Jesus but spoke, and blind people received their sight. From reading the gospel narratives, you discover that Jesus touched upon people's lives in different ways.

He was not restricted to one particular way in helping people. He could heal with a touch, but he could also heal with a word.

[28 : 59] He could heal without a word, by an act of his mere will. A glance was as efficacious as a touch.

His invisible presence was as powerful as has been there in a sick room. And so this miracle has some unique features about it, but especially this.

Instead of there being an instant cure, it was a case of progressive recovery. And maybe the type of blindness of the man lent itself to such an approach, I don't know.

To go from midnight blackness to the full bright light of day in a moment, I would have thought would be very painful.

A progressive flooding of light along the optic nerves to the brain would appear to be more suitable, but then perhaps a doctor might disagree.

[30 : 08] I'm not sure. There is something quite natural, isn't there, about a gradual cure. And yet that was absent in the healing of other men who were also blind.

So three thoughts from our text today. First, the assumption of an aimless group. Some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him.

Secondly, the anticipation of the blind man. And you get the impression that his sense of anticipation was at a very low level.

And thirdly, the appreciable surpassing of his expectation. First, the assumption of an aimless group.

When a person's life has been touched by Jesus, often they wish to share that experience with others.

[31 : 12] It's as if there is a nooner compulsion to share the experience of divine intervention in their lives.

And you remember one powerful example in John's Gospel. The woman by the well, the woman of Samaria. And how because of the intervention of Jesus into her life, how she rushed back to her own village to tell others about what Christ had done.

And you remember the reaction of the people. And they, many of them claimed, not because of the woman's statement, but because of the teachings of Christ, they believed in him.

And you may be present here today, and in your own experience, you can testify that when Christ came into your life, that you too wanted to share it, perhaps first of all, with your immediate family. those closest to you in life. And you wanted to tell them about the good news that had changed your life for good.

[32 : 33] In our text this morning, we are told of a group of unnamed people who brought a blind friend to Jesus and pleaded with Jesus to touch their blind friend.

It's not too clear from the context whether they themselves had benefited from the touch of Jesus, had their lives been changed around by Jesus, or had they merely been influenced in some way by his teaching.

Maybe that one of the group had been the recipient of Christ's healing touch, but I'm in the realm of speculation, and therefore I cannot be sure about that.

What seems certain is that they were convinced that Jesus, by a touch, could do something for their friend. Their conviction wasn't just theoretical, it was practical in its application.

They didn't just discuss the possibility of this man being given sight, they brought the blind man to Jesus. Note of Mark introduces this miracle to us, and they came to Bethsaida.

[33 : 51] You ask yourself the question, who are they who came to Bethsaida? The answer is Jesus and his disciples, and Mark continues his narrative, and some people brought to him a blind man.

Mark is not the wordy type. In reading his gospel, you get the impression that it's as if he was always in a hurry to communicate his gospel information.

So he tells almost in the same breath when he writes of Jesus coming to Bethsaida of how a blind man was brought by a nameless group of people to Jesus.

Obviously this nameless group were very earnest, and I think probably very insistent in their appeal to Jesus. They had a shared concern for this blind man, and they had decided among themselves how Jesus should deal with their blind friend.

And they are an example of how often in our ignorance we are inclined to dictate to God to dictate to God how he should act, as if the all-knowing God could not decide for himself.

[35 : 08] It is possible that these friends were Gentiles rather than Jews, and the reason I suggest that is that Bethsaida was a Gentile area. Did they place more faith in the touch of Jesus than they did in Jesus himself?

It's a possibility. It was certainly true of the woman who had suffered from constant hemorrhaging, and of whom Mark tells for twelve years.

You remember how she was in the crowd that thronged around Jesus. And we are privileged to be given an insight into her thought process.

Mark reports it in chapter five. She said, If I touch even his garments, I will be made well. Luke, in his gospel account of that healing, tells us that Jesus asked, Who was it that touched me?

A question the disciples thought, pointless, even foolish, given that he was surrounded on all sides by a throng of people. But Jesus, you remember, had good reason to ask.

[36 : 22] Someone touched me. This is the reason, For I perceive that power has gone out from me. He was aware of power emanating from him to this woman.

And in that example of healing, Jesus left the woman in no doubt that her healing was as a consequence of her faith and not her touch. He said to her, daughter, your faith has made you well.

Go in peace and be healed of your disease. Well, whether the nameless friends of this blind man were of a similar mind, I cannot say with certainty, although I would be prepared to accept that it is a possibility.

They at least believed that Jesus could heal their friend. In that assumption, they were correct. They were even sure they knew how Jesus would and should heal their friend.

And there is always the danger that we think that the grace of Jesus should operate in a certain way. And perhaps we are inclined to base that on our own experience.

[37 : 36] It reminds me of the very first time I attended a Friday morning of communion services. That would have been August 1968 as a young man.

As some of you know, then and for many years before and after, the Friday morning galley communion service took the form of a fellowship meeting.

A verse of scripture would be given out by one of the male communicant members. The senior guest minister would seek to place the verse in its context and give a brief exposition of the text. Then men from various congregations were called to speak to the text from their own particular experiences.

And the junior guest minister had the duty of summarizing what had taken place. As a relatively new convert, then, when I heard a speaker refer to their experience in a way to which I could personally relate, I considered that I belonged to those who were among God's people.

[38 : 56] I felt uplifted, but then I would hear a speaker to whose experience I couldn't relate at all. And I would descend into the trough.

I felt despondent. It was a kind of strange seesaw experience. For then in my ignorance, I did not appreciate the countless different ways in which people are brought to Christ.

You see, it's not our experience that is the norm for others. It's our belief in that faith rests on Christ alone for salvation.

The experience of the touch varies, but God's grace is the same. The nameless friends correctly expected Jesus to heal their blind friend, but they were wrong in their assumption of the method of healing required to give him sight.

That's my first point, the assumption of an nameless group. Second, the anticipation of the blind man. A blind man, someone who is extremely vulnerable, so dependent on the ministry of others.

[40 : 21] And you know, when you read the story, at least this is my impression, that this blind man didn't expect much. Now, that could be true for several reasons.

Maybe he had been brought to a healer before, only to have his hopes dashed. Or it could be that he suffered from a measure of disappointment and loss of hope, having been blind for such a length of time.

what hope could there possibly be for him? He would just have to live with his disability. Whatever the reason, there is no indication given by Mark that this man pled with Jesus himself for healing. The pleading is all done by his nameless friends. And you cannot help but contrast the attitude of this man with that of blind Bartimaeus.

You remember Mark also records how that man was sitting by the roadside begging and when he heard that Jesus was passing by, he began to shout out with great passion, loudly and insistently,!

[41 : 37] Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me! And that was despite the attempts of those who were present to silence him. You remember when Jesus made known that he wished Bartimaeus to come close to him?

Mark tells us he threw off his cloak. He sprang up and came to Jesus and Jesus said, what do you want me to do for you? Blind man said to him, oh let me recover my sight.

And Jesus said, go your way, your faith has made you well. And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way. But the same passion and desire for healing do not appear to be visible in the life of this man.

The insistent pleading displayed by Bartimaeus seems to be missing from the life of this blind person at that particular moment.

And it seems to me that he's saying I've been brought here so, so, seems to be his attitude.

[42 : 44] And I wonder, in passing can I ask, is that you today? Did you come to the service this morning with little or no expectation of anything taking place in your life?

Did you come with the attitude you've heard it all before? You've been here often and returned home. You've performed your duty, paid your dues, etc.

Have you ever thought of asking the Lord to raise your level of expectation? If you are really serious about the salvation of your never dying soul, have you thought about asking the Lord to raise your level of expectation?

expectation? I sincerely hope that if it is true of you that you have a low level of expectation, that it is shattered in such a way that God shines into your heart to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

The anticipation of the blind man, you are forced to conclude that his anticipation level was very low. The assumption of the nameless group, just a touch.

[44 : 01] Thirdly, the appreciable surpassing of the blind man's expectation. How was that achieved? Note what Jesus did initially.

He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village. There is the touch that the blind man's friends requested.

dead. They were waiting for developments, but nothing appears to have happened. How initially disappointing that must have been for them after all their effort.

But we are told Jesus took the blind man by the hand. hand. Now, we're not being told that Jesus shook his hand by way of introduction.

That is not to say, but that handshakes can have significance. Some handshakes can be very cold. Others can be most warm and welcoming.

[45 : 09] You can frequently tell a lot from just a handshake. But in this context, it wasn't just a mere handshake. Jesus holds on to the hand of the blind man.

And the impression is created that he clasped the hand of the blind man in his own hand. And until then, there was something almost pathetic about the blind man standing there, hopeless, listless, not believing that this Jewish stranger was going to do anything for him.

His impassive, blind face, expressionless, no pleading and treated to reinforce his companions' prayers. And if that was the case, how was Jesus to get close to him?

How was Jesus to make contact with this man? How was he to get, as it were, into the heart of the man, get alongside his life?

Jesus could speak, but the man's sightless eyes were unable to see the sympathy and love that shone from the face of the Lord, the great physician.

[46 : 40] So this is what he does, he clasped his hand in his. listless, and from that action, the helpless, listless, indifferent man may have concluded at the very least, here is someone who has a genuine interest in me, someone who really cares about my plight, heart, and his listless indifference must have taken a backseat dispelled by the warmth of the new contact.

Not only did he take him by the hand, but he led him out of the village. And there's no indication that the blind man sought to resist. He obviously found it reassuring to be led by Jesus out of the village, despite his extreme vulnerability.

No evidence that he was distraught, been led around by someone unknown to him, someone he has just met. Jesus takes him away from the crowd and isolates this man.

Mark says nothing about any conversation between them, and perhaps my imagination is working overtime, but I tend to think of this walk as a time of conversation, between Jesus and the disabled man whom he holds by the hand as he guides him out of the village, past all obstacles that may have been strewn in the way, obstacles that could have posed a real threat to the well-being of this vulnerable blind person.

One would love to know, if there was conversation, what the topic was. Did the blind man pour out the story of his life to this Jesus who held him by the hand?

[48 : 41] Did Jesus ask probing questions to elicit more information from the man? Did that prompt the vulnerable, disabled person to express his inner thoughts and fears to this warm, sensitive, compassionate new friend?

Perhaps even thoughts and fears he had suppressed before, even from himself and never dared to speak until now. Possible, but I don't really know.

But you know, whether that happened or not, Jesus, through his word, often isolates those with whom he deals, even when you're surrounded by other people.

He uses various providences to isolate us like illness, causing some event in our providence that leaves us unable to be present in our chosen sphere of activity.

Other times might be just the removal of loved ones from life, leaving us lonely on the desert journey of life. But however he does it, is he not saying to us, come away by yourselves to a desolate place.

[50 : 02] And the reason for isolation is that he may speak tenderly to them, just as he did to Israel of old, as recorded for us in the prophecy of Hosea.

Therefore, behold, I will allude her and bring her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her.

Literally, it means to speak heart to heart.

And this speaker, Jesus, when he speaks to our heart, has such a comprehensive understanding of our hearts, so that if you were present in the service this morning or watching online, you would not have been the first to have felt isolated by the truth as it addresses your hopes and your fears.

Maybe you feel isolated by some peculiar providence today. Many people are singled out by the Lord in the middle of a crowd and are dressed in a way that leaves them in no doubt that the message is just for you.

And yes, there is something about Jesus that makes you want to confide in him. the very loving warmth of his sympathetic heart coming into contact with our deep human need.

[51 : 34] Perhaps you are present today and you can testify to the reality of such a meeting in your own life. For the very first time, you met someone who really understood your needs.

you know, we use the phrase often at times of traumatic experiences in the lives of friends, I feel your pain.

We don't really. But here is one who is able to come alongside us in our pain and to address our needs in a way no one else can.

So, in many ways, this blind man should be a figure of envy for us.

Not everyone is afforded the privilege of God incarnate, Jesus Christ leading them by the hand. It's a very touching picture of deep pastoral care and love on the part of the heavenly shepherd.

[52 : 41] And being led in this way, you must conclude that the level of expectation and faith in the life of this man was been quickened.

But the great physician having isolated this man then does something that may appear strange, perhaps even repulsive to us. He spat on the eyes of the blind man and laid his hands on him. Now, remember these glazed eyeballs were possibly diseased, encrusted, and he sprayed them with spittle. And then he placed his calloused hands because, remember, he had been a carpenter in his earlier years.

I suppose you could say that these actions, which seem more than a little strange to us, were like a ladder to which the budding faith of this blind person might cling.

here was a method of communication where Jesus entered into the thought world of this blind man and established significant contact with him.

[53 : 55] He had grabbed his attention. You know, sometimes Jesus uses what may appear to us peculiar methods to grab our attention and hold our attention so that we listen to what he has to say.

I like to think that as Jesus held his fingers on the hitherto sightless eyes of this man that hope and faith were surging in the heart of this man.

And then he asks the question, do you see anything? Now, as you know, that would be an extremely foolish question to ask a blind man, do you see anything?

something. But something miraculous had taken place. The man for the first time saw light and color. But that's not his initial response.

He looked up and he said, I see people, but they look like trees walking. His vision was unclear. It's as if he was looking through water and seeing people with blurry movement.

[55 : 02] They look like trees walking is his answer. Now, I wouldn't wish to make this man's experience the basis for the doctrine of spiritual experience.

What I will say is that coming to Christ is but the beginning of clear sea in the life of any person. I could also say, as I have said already, that most people's experiences are unique to themselves. Paul, writing to the Ephesians, states that believers are God's workmanship. And literally the language there is, they are God's poems, his masterpieces, individual works of art, if you like, and the process unique to each one.

And for that to happen, we require to submit to the touch of Jesus. Jesus, not everyone, has a sudden Damascus road experience.

For many, the transition from darkness to light is gradual. More and more light filters into their lives so that they come to see more clearly the way of salvation through faith in Christ.

[56 : 24] Christ. And here Jesus is encouraging this man to trust by demonstrating his own power. He can see, but not clearly. And then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again, and he opened his eyes.

His sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. Now remember, Mark got a lot of his information from Peter the disciple. and it seems to me that you can almost hear Peter in the excited way that he describes what took place.

Enthusiastically describing the outcome of the touch of Jesus, he saw everything clearly. Literally, he saw everything clearly from afar.

In other words, he had 20-20 vision. Those who may have experience of successful cataract surgery, you can understand how that is true literally.

Your vision through the cataract becomes so clouded, and when it is removed and the operation is successful, you have perfect sight. It's a whole new world for you.

[57 : 40] No spectacle is required to see or to drive, maybe for reading yes, and I'm speaking here from personal experience, as one who was wearing glasses from the time I was a teenager, and I hated wearing them, right up until I was over 70 years of age.

I know I have vision that I never had before. Such is the wonder of surgical skills today, and I have to say I'm really indebted to those who performed these operations.

However, could this man not say, with another, who experienced the wonderful restoration of sight, one thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.

What a wonderful transformation, from being enclosed in a bleak, sightless, dark world devoid of color, to being granted the power of sight, and to behold the marvels of creation.

But much more, much, much more, to have a new saving relationship with Jesus Christ, the miracle worker who transforms lives, so that lives come to reflect his power and grace.

[59 : 07] How little is known of self and your Savior at the outset of your Christian walk. Christian progress does not consist in seeing new things, but in seeing the old things more clearly, the same Christ, the same cross, only more distinctly and deeply apprehended and more closely incorporated into our being.

We do not grow away from him, but we grow into knowledge of him. And if I were to read anything at all into the second touch, it is this, that throughout this life, the Bible tells us, we see in a mirror dimly, but in glorification, the believer will no longer see fragments of Christ, but his full glory revealed before them.

That will certainly be a moment of surpassing expectation. The psalmist possessed this assurance and confidence as he contrasted his own life with that of the men of the world, and you remember what he said, as for me, he says, and there is emphasis on that phrase, I shall behold your face and righteousness, when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness.

Without question, whilst we are here, we require our spiritual vision to be sharpened. That is what I believe lay behind Paul's prayer for those believers at Ephesus as he prayed for them.

This man had new vision. He saw clearly what praise there must have been in his life of one whose initial expectations had appeared so low.

[61 : 05] His expectations miraculously exceeded, and so it is, for every person who is united to faith in Christ, the half has not been told.

So as we draw the service to our close, let me ask first of all, are you present today or watching online and you do not see clearly?

you do not see yourself as a sinner or Christ as a Savior. Let me conclude by setting what I consider a most appropriate prayer for every one of us before our minds and heart, a prayer which was included in our second item of praise this morning.

Open my eyes grace that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. We all require spiritual illumination.

May God in his supreme and wonderful grace grant a response to every heart from which that prayer arises in truth. The assumption of an aimless group, just a touch will do.

[62 : 21] it required more than a touch. The anticipation of the blind man at a very low level initially. The appreciative surpassing of his expectation, he saw clearly.

Oh, wouldn't you all love to see clearly this morning as we gather to worship his name? let us pray. Eternal and ever blessed one, thou art the miracle working God, the God who transforms broken, bruised lives, shapes these lives, and molds them into the image of thy dear son.

Oh, forbid that any of us be strangers to the power of thy wonderful grace, and the glory shall be thine. In Jesus' name we ask it.

Amen. Let us conclude by singing from Psalm 103. It's in the Psalms verse and page 135.

Praise God, my soul, with all my heart, let me exalt his holy name. forget not all his benefits, his praise my soul, in song proclaimed.

[63 : 54] Down to the end of the verse, Mark 7. Praise God, my soul. Praise God, my soul, my soul, with all my heart, let me exalt his glory in.

Forget notNING All your sins And kills your sickness And distress Your life he rescues From the grave And counts you in his tenderness He satisfies Your deep desires From his unending source of good So that just like

The evil's fact Your youth for vigor is renewed The Lord is known For righteous acts And justice to Young trodden ones To Moses he Made on his ways His mighty deeds To Israel's sons Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ The love of God the Father Fellowship and communion of his Holy Spirit Rest on and abide with you all Now and forever Amen Amen Amen Amen.