



# TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

## What Open Eyes Must See

Mark 8.22-26

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### *Called to See Clearly*

D. L. Moody once said, "The Bible was not given to increase our knowledge but to change our lives."<sup>1</sup> We closed our previous sermon on our text with that statement, followed by this statement: "Whether the Bible succeeds in changing us depends on how serious we are about hearing and doing what it says."

I asked you to consider those statements in light of Mark 8.22-26, verses that tell about the time it took Jesus two attempts to heal a blind man. The episode illustrates a challenge he faced throughout his ministry: Would people really see him correctly and develop deeper faith or remain blind, whether partially or completely?

- We reviewed the action of the Pharisees. Despite having seen signs that should have led them to see Jesus was the Christ, they tested him by seeking yet another sign (8.11-13).
- The disciples saw more clearly than the Pharisees, but their sight was only partial (cf. Mark 4.11-13; 6.52; 7.14; 8.17) even though Jesus kept trying to help them see (8.21).
- Even after they declared that Jesus was "the Christ" (8.29), they were slow to understand when Jesus explained what that entailed (8.31-33; 9.31-32; 10.32-45).

But eventually they did come to understand. Writings by disciples in the years subsequent to Jesus' ministry show how that understanding comes about.

- Submit to God's way, not the world's way (Jas 4.6-7; 1 John 2.15-17; Rom 12.1-2).
- Desire the word of God the way babies crave milk (1 Pet 2.2).
- Have the attitude of the psalmist, committing to God's word so completely that we make obedience to his rules our way of life (Ps 119.97, 101-104).

Today, we build on these things to consider what we must see to have that depth of commitment and faith.

### *Getting Past Things That Hinder*

We should first admit that we can be pulled away from commitment to God's word by things that appeal to our flesh, our eyes, and our pride (1 John 2.15-17). The problem is that we meditate on the wrong things, as a look at some Old Testament's uses of "meditate" illustrates.

- Of all the references to meditating on the word of God, the most famous is probably Psalm 1:2 where the writer says he "meditates on his law day and night" (cf. Josh 1.8).<sup>2</sup>

- But the word used in Psalm 1.2 has other meanings, including “to groan, to growl, to utter, to speak, or to muse.”<sup>3</sup> In Isaiah 31.4, the Lord illustrates his intent to intervene for Mount Zion with the way a lion “*growls* over his prey.” The picture is of a lion lingering over his food, taking delight in it, savoring it.<sup>4</sup>
- In Isaiah 59.3, after the declaration in verses 1-2 that the reason God was separated from them was because of their iniquities, Isaiah elaborates what they were doing: “For your hands are defiled with blood and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies; your tongue *mutter*s wickedness, . . .”

Whether we delight in God’s word like a lion over dinner or remain caught up in the attraction of sin depends on who we treat as our Master. We must choose: either God or the world (Matt 6.24; Rom 12.1-2). Obviously, seeing how the world can distract us from God is vital to the process of growing deeper faith. But it is not all we must see.

### *Truth Above All*

We will never overcome the pull of the world without an unreserved devotion to the truth. That is what frees us (John 8.32). The New Testament repeatedly emphasizes this. Forms of the Greek noun “truth” and three cognates appear 165 times in the New Testament;<sup>5</sup> 109 are in Acts-Revelation, writings about the church’s life and written to exhort it.

We have time to notice only a few representative examples. In 1 Timothy 4.3, Paul contrasted those who were forbidding marriage and requiring abstinence from certain foods with “those who believe and know the truth.” In Romans 2.8, he called some to account because they “[did] not obey the truth.” In Galatians, he corrected Peter and others because “their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel” (2.14) and later asked them, “Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth?” (4.16).

One passage that especially highlights the importance of commitment to truth and what it looks like is 2 Thessalonians 2.9-13. The theme of verses 1-12 is “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 1). In statements that have puzzled many interpreters, Paul says that “the rebellion comes first” when “the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction” who is opposed to all that is good and presumes to “take his seat in the temple of God” (vv. 3-4). The “Lord Jesus will kill” the lawless one “and bring [his work] to nothing” (v. 8).

We don’t need to determine the precise meaning of verses 1-8 to understand verses 9-13.

- To choose “the man of lawlessness” is to choose the way and deeds of Satan (v. 9).
- Satan is a deceiver and those who follow him will perish (v. 10).
- They will perish because they “believe what is false” (v. 11), “condemned [because they] did not believe the truth” (v. 12).
- In contrast, salvation results for those who are “sanctifi[ed] by the Spirit and belief in the truth” (v. 13).

*Believing* the truth is thus necessary for salvation. But that is not the most important thing Paul says about it here. Why do the deceived not believe it? Paul says it is “because they did not receive the *love* (ἀγάπη, *agapē*) of the truth so as to be saved” (v. 10 NASB).

The world besieges us with challenges to compromise our commitment to truth. Because people believe things for multiple reasons, including habit, convenience, and tangible rewards, Jesus’ followers must regularly evaluate whether we really love “the truth, the whole truth, and

nothing but the truth.” Without that love, we will relax our pursuit of truth and fail to fully believe and obey it. To help us think through the implications of loving the truth, one of my teachers once handed out a list of some questions that help to reveal our true motives. Here are some of the more important things he included on his list.

- Am I willing to hear — really hear — all sides of a matter fairly before making up my mind about what is true?
- Do I understand that just because I or those close to me have believed something for many years does not necessarily mean that it is true?
- Am I willing to change my view, to give up any previous belief I have held that cannot be supported by the evidence?
- Am I willing to accept and live according to a point of truth even when people who matter in my life don’t?
- Am I willing to admit when I am wrong?

### *Committed to Love for Truth*

The gold standard for loving truth is a group of Jews Paul encountered in the Greek town of Berea. His good work in Thessalonica was cut short by some jealous Jews who incited a mob and supported people who esteemed Caesar above Jesus (Acts 17.1-7) (the opposite of their charge against Paul). For their safety, Paul and Silas were sent to Berea where they went to the synagogue and began preaching. Verse 11 says that the Berean “Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.”

Think about that. Paul, the visiting rabbi who told them their long awaited Messiah had come, had obviously impressed them. But they didn’t just take him at his word. They loved the truth enough to subject his teaching to scrutiny. And Scripture commends them for doing so.

Someone has said there are only two ways you can study the Bible: with your mind made up, or to let it make up your mind.<sup>6</sup> Which one we choose depends on how much we love the truth. Which one describes you?

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Edward K. Rowell, ed., *Quotes and Idea Starters for Preaching and Teaching from Leadership Journal* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 14.

<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew word (הָגָה, *hāgāh*) in Ps 1.2 and related passages is different from the one used in Ps 119.97 (סִיחָה, *siyḥāh*), though the latter word does share the idea of musing on something.

<sup>3</sup> Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, Accordance electronic ed., version 4.5 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906).

<sup>4</sup> I am indebted to Harold Shank for this connection and insight. See his *Listening to His Heartbeat: What the Bible Says About the Heartbeat of God* (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 2009), 26.

<sup>5</sup> The words include the noun, ἀλήθεια, (*alētheia*) [109]; adjectives ἀληθής (*alēthēs*) [26], and ἀληθινός (*alēthinos*) [28]; and verb ἀληθεύω (*alētheuō*) [2]. Word counts are from a search of the UBS5 Greek text in the Accordance Bible software (OakTree Software, Inc.).

Louw and Nida define the adjectives, “pertaining to being *real* and not imaginary” (my emphasis) (Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd Accordance electronic ed., version 4.4. United Bible Societies, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> Michael P. Green, ed., *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 31.