

“Seeing is Believing”

<u>Occasion</u>	Evening Service at Therfield Chapel
<u>Day, Date & Time</u>	Sunday 19 th July 2009 at 18:30
<u>Basis</u>	Mark 8:14-30
<u>Reading</u>	Mark 8:11-30 Matthew 16:1, 2a, 4-20
<u>Songs</u>	from Mission Praise: from The Source:
<u>Author/Speaker</u>	Paul Rydon

Do you believe what you see
or see what you believe?

For most of us,
seeing is believing.

We have been brought up with a materialistic mind-set that only believes what it sees.
We have been conditioned by our environment
by the world view around us
to only believe what we see.

Yet as Christians we fall into the category of those who have not seen,
yet believe.

Jesus’ disciples spent three and a half years with Jesus,
slowly beginning to see who he was,
yet after the resurrection,
when Jesus appeared to them

only then did they see!

But Thomas wasn’t there and he wouldn’t believe the others.

He wanted proof before he would believe.

So the next time Jesus appeared,
he challenged him,

“Put your finger here;

“Reach out your hand and put it in my side.”

“Stop doubting and believe.”

Then he said, “Because you have seen me you have believed;

Blessed are those who have not seen, yet have believed.” (John:20:26-29)

At the last supper, Jesus prayed for his disciples,
then he said,

‘My prayer is not for them alone.

I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message’ (John 17:20)

Whatever we see
or observe,
we filter through our current world view.
We screen what we see
and interpret it according to the way we think.

Have you ever taken a photo of a beautiful landscape
or a lake and mountains
or some especially attractive buildings,
and when you look at that picture later
right in the middle,
taking up all the foreground of the picture is a tourist
or a dustbin
or a car
or some ugly object,
and even if it isn’t unsightly,
it still dominates the picture.

This is because our brains screen out what we don’t want to see
and our attention is focussed on the beauty.
But the camera records what we ignore.

So it is with our thoughts.
We screen out what we don’t want to address
and focus only on what we appreciate
or what agrees with our presuppositions,
our existing knowledge
and our understanding.

Today’s passage is a study of human response to the presence of a man called Jesus.

As they watched and listened to this man,
what did they really see?
Did they see a miracle worker?
Did they see a charlatan?
Did they see their promised Messiah?
Did they see the Son of God?

As we look at what Mark has written here,
we need perhaps to put his writing into context.
We have to remember that Mark wasn’t there.
But he wrote down all that he learned from Peter,
who was there.

Matthew on the other hand was there and as a result,
his version sometimes has a different emphasis.
So Mark tends to put stories together that suit his purpose,
and not necessarily in a chronological order.
So it will be interesting to see why Mark connected these stories together
as he did.

Also to fill out the stories,
we shall include the extra detail that Matthew provides.

Following on from the feeding of the four thousand,
Jesus and his disciples get into the boat and go to the region of Dalmanutha.
This area was to the West of the sea of Galilee
and hence in Jewish territory.
Here the Pharisees begin to question Jesus
and demand a sign from heaven.
Exasperated, He gives a deep sigh and says that no sign shall be given
except the sign of Jonah.

Paul Zanreps covered the significance of that statement in his sermon last week,
suggesting that Jesus was referring to his death and resurrection.
I only mention the incident tonight, as I think it is relevant to what follows.

Entering the boat again,
they set off up the Lake towards Bethsaida.
And as they were sailing along,
Jesus, was musing on his recent confrontation when he suddenly says
'out of the blue',
"beware of the leaven of the Pharisees"

Leaven, or yeast as the NIV says
spreads through the whole batch of dough,
when making bread.

Leaven had been used as a symbol of sin over the centuries
and you would have thought that the disciples would have understood.
But they were so pre-occupied with their own failure to bring enough food
that they immediately jumped to the conclusion
that he was having a go at them over their short-comings
in not preparing for the journey.

Over-hearing their mutterings,
Jesus is amazed that they still don't get it.
In fact He's quite scathing:
"Why on earth are you talking of having no bread." he says
You've got eyes, but you don't see!
You've got ears, but you don't hear!
How many baskets did we pick up after we fed the five thousand?
And how many after we fed the four thousand?
And you're fretting about bread!!!!
You still don't get it do you.

He was of course referring back to his recent confrontation with the Pharisees.
Saying how much they should be ware of their attitude.
The sin of the Pharisees was that of self-righteousness.
He suggests that the leaven of the Pharisees
is the sin and hypocrisy which had filled their lives.
They had constructed a religious creed which they kept to the letter,

yet they had no relationship with their God.
In their eyes they were the righteous ones
and those who didn't meet their man-made standards were guilty of sin.
But because they had no spiritual insight,
they were too blind to see what Jesus was all about.
Sadly some Christians fall into this trap today,
quickly condemning those who do not appear to live holy lives.
Yet themselves not living by faith as children of God.
Matthew spells it out clearly, that then they understood that he was not talking about
the yeast used in bread, but about the teaching of the Pharisees

And so Jesus and his disciples arrive at the village of Bethsaida,
at the northern end of the lake.
This village was just outside Galilee on the eastern side of the upper Jordan River,
in Gentile territory.
Bethsaida was the native home of Philip,
Andrew and Peter,
though by the time Jesus called them they were fishermen,
based in Capernaum on the shore of the lake,
well inside Jewish territory.
And Peter had a house there.

While in Bethsaida,
some people bring a blind man to Jesus to be healed.
Notice the compassion of Jesus at this point and the intimate detail.
Jesus takes the blind man by the hand
and leads him outside the village

Spitting on his closed eyes,
Jesus touches the man.
"Do you see anything?" He asks.
"I see people" he replies.
"They look like trees walking!"
For a second time,
Jesus touches the man's eyes
and his sight was completely restored.
Jesus sends him home to his family
rather than back into the village.

I wonder why Mark includes this story at this very point in his Gospel?
Matthew leaves it out.
But maybe Peter,
when he preached
always included this little incident by way of illustration,
and Mark faithfully includes it in the record.

This is the only case in the New Testament
where Jesus heals a man in two stages.

Why?

And why here?

Maybe Peter was trying to get across how hard it was
in those early times
for them to see the truth about Jesus
And it needed many second touches before they could see and understand,
Just as it does with us.

They had witnessed his miracles,
they had listened to his parables,
they had heard his discourses and his arguments with the Jewish teachers
and the proud legalistic Pharisees,
but he had not taught them specifically about his mission.

He had told them where he had come from,
but not where he was going.

That was yet to come.

Maybe there was an illustration in the story of this blind man of Bethsaida
that showed how step by step they came to see
who Jesus really was.

And so Jesus and his disciples move further inland,
further into gentile territory
to the villages around Caesarea Philippi.

And as they go, Jesus raises a question:
"Who do people say that I am?"

The question of who Jesus *is* or *was*
is probably the greatest question of all of time.
For if Jesus is not who he claimed to be,
then our faith is in vain
and we are of all people the most deluded.

His disciples tell him that some think that he is John the Baptist come back to life.
I find that fascinating that they should think that.
These people are open to the idea of resurrection!!

Some, they say, think that he is Elijah.
Elijah was a famous Old Testament prophet who was taken up to heaven
in a whirlwind at the end of his life. (2 Kings 2:1-18)

And many Jews taught that Elijah would return first,
before Messiah would come.

In Matthew 17, it seems that Jesus is referring to John the Baptist when he says that
Elijah has already come. (Matthew 17:10-13)

Confirming that it was John who was the forerunner of Christ,
rather than the popular notion of Elijah returning in a second life.

Others, they say, just grasp at straws
and think that maybe he might be Jeremiah, or one of the other prophets.

"But what about you?" he asks.
"Who do you say that I am?"

And Peter answers it seems without hesitation, “You are the Christ,”
adding, according to Matthew, “the Son of the living God.” (Matthew 16:16)
Jesus is delighted.

“Blessed are you Simon son of Jonah,” he says. (Matthew 16:17)

So what was it that led Peter to this remarkable conclusion?

If this Gospel is indeed the preaching of Peter in Rome,
written down by Mark for the Roman Christians,
then the answer will be found in Mark’s record.

And so unsurprisingly we find that Mark opens his Gospel with the very words:
“The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” (Mark 1:1)

When Jesus was baptized in the river Jordan by John the Baptist,
Peter would not have been there,
but he would certainly have heard about it.
He would have known that as Jesus came up out of the water,
heaven was torn open and the Spirit descended on him like a dove,
and a voice out of heaven was heard to say
“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” (Mark 1:9-11)

He would remember as though it were yesterday, the day that Jesus,
walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee,
called him and his brother Andrew to follow him.
They had never heard such authority and such compulsion.
They left their nets and followed.

He had witnessed Jesus’ power and authority over the demons
and seen him cast them out
and people released from their oppression. (e.g. Mark 1:25)
He had been there when his Mother-in-law was healed from a fever
and the same evening after sundown had seen so many healed. (Mark 1:29-34)

He had listened as Jesus argued with the Pharisees about fasting
and about Sabbath observance. (Mark 2: -28)
He had heard his compelling and authoritative response
to their questions and accusations.

He had listened to the parables and their explanation. (Mark 4:1-34)

He had been in the boat when Jesus calmed the storm. (Mark 4:33-41)

He had been in the very room,
when Jairus’ daughter had been brought back to life.
(Mark 5:40-43)

He was there when Jesus walked on the water. (Mark 6:46-52)
He helped to feed the five thousand (Mark 6:30-44)

and the four.

(Mark 8:1-13)

But above all, he had listened to Jesus' teachings.

He had noted that Jesus always spoke with authority;

That the demons knew who he was.

That he did the things that the Messiah would do.

As Jesus had said to John the Baptist's messengers:

"The blind see,

the lame walk,

the lepers are cured,

the deaf hear,

the dead live,

and the good news is preached to the poor.

Blessed is the man who does not fall away because of me."

(Matthew 11:4-6)

Everything that Peter had seen and heard

had convinced him that this man was indeed the long awaited Messiah,

but more than that, he was indeed the Son of God

sent down from heaven by the Father

to reveal God to man.

We have to go to Matthew for Jesus' response.

Whilst all the evidence was there,

Peter would not have seen the truth

unless the Father had revealed it to him.

Notice that Jesus does not refute Peter's statement,

but endorses it.

Some have taken Jesus' remarks about building his church on 'this rock'

to mean that the church would be built on Peter himself

and from this have developed the idea of apostolic succession from Peter.

But this is an unlikely interpretation and fraught with danger.

Peter did become the leading figure among the apostles

and indeed probably the bishop of the Church in Rome,

but the Rock on which the Church would be built is Christ himself,

the only Son of God.

Some see the keys of the Kingdom as keys of stewardship,

keys to open to the whole world the way to the church

and passed down through generations of church leadership

as stewards of the kingdom of God.

And they were given to Peter to lead the church forward

after the resurrection and ascension of Christ

when the apostles were left behind with the great commission

to take the message of Christ to the whole world.

This event marks a turning point in Mark's gospel,

for as we see next week,
from then on Jesus starts to instruct his disciples
on the real nature of his mission.

In the Jewish mind,
Messiah was a victor.
One sent from God to overturn the oppressors
and re-establish the Jewish nation on earth.
The idea that this Messiah would suffer apparent defeat
was anathema to the Jewish mind.

Peter has seen what so many failed to see
that this Jesus was indeed the Son of God.
The Pharisees filtered what they saw through their own presuppositions
and saw merely an impostor an unauthorised teacher,
who failed to keep their rules.

In post modern Britain today,
Jesus doesn't fit.
He is an archaic teacher in a Jewish nation two thousand years ago.
He is presented in a bible which many believe is irrelevant.
Modern society has no time for a God of any sought
who doesn't fit their material world view
and doesn't meet the standards of scientific evidence required today.

Yet there is still a spiritual hunger out there
that longs for something to satisfy the yearnings of the hearts of men and
women.
For those with eyes to see and ears to hear,
Jesus is the Christ the Saviour of mankind.
and He fills that void,
for he is the creator of us all.

My prayer is that all of us will not only acknowledge Jesus as Lord,
but develop a world-view and a way of life that demonstrates
not only that we live for him,
but also that we have good reasons to believe
in him who is the Saviour of the world.

Seeing truly is believing.
May we see and believe.

Amen

Paul Rydon – 19 July 2009