

SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS (Mk. 8:11-21)

Mk. 8:11 And the Pharisees came forth, and began to question with him, seeking of him a sign from heaven, tempting him. 12 And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and saith, Why doth this generation seek after a sign? verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation. 13 And he left them, and entering into the ship again departed to the other side. 14 Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, neither had they in the ship with them more than one loaf. 15 And he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod. 16 And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have no bread. 17 And when Jesus knew it, he saith unto them, Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened? 18 Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember? 19 When I brake the five loaves among five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? They say unto him, Twelve. 20 And when the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? And they said, Seven. 21 And he said unto them, How is it that ye do not understand?

How the Lord must often be frustrated with us! ... There is so much to do for Him and we are what He has to do it ... Surely He could have chosen so much better! ... Or at least, that is how it looks. It would have been far easier if He had remained in Heaven away from all the troubles and just left us the way we were ... but He didn't ... for He came into this world to go to the cross to become our Saviour. ... He has a purpose in saving us.

The story continues, first of all, with the Pharisees, **Mk. 8:11** And the Pharisees came forth, and began to question with him, seeking of him a sign from heaven, tempting him. 12 And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and saith, Why doth this generation seek after a sign? verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation. 13 And he left them, and entering into the ship again departed to the other side. ... The Pharisees were suffering from a serious debilitating condition, - spiritual blindness, - and unfortunately, it affected the whole nation ... and, indeed, the whole of mankind, **II Cor. 4:3** But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: 4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

... It is a deep and profound spiritual handicap that renders us, - of ourselves, - not able to realise the things of God, - it is not a blindness of the eyes, but it is a blindness of the mind and heart. ... It is looking at the truth but not being able to see it! It is hearing the truth but not being able to understand it. ... It is the Biblical diagnosis of how spiritually incapable we are, - through our own human means, - to discover God.

It is the reason unregenerate people can read the Bible but not realise what it is saying and therefore, arrive at conclusions contrary to the intentions of God. ... They go off in a particular direction that has little or no bearing on how the Holy Spirit, - Who is the Teacher, - intended it ... and then they teach and promote error ... And that is the kind of scenario Paul was referring to when

he wrote to Timothy, **II Tim. 4:3** For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; **4** And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables

Ah, but some might say ... you must not be dogmatic for you have to allow for the other person to have *their* opinion. ... And that is fair enough! But, in such a serious matter as our salvation, and what we believe about God ... we must get it right ... and to get it right there is only one place to go and that is to the Word of God, and it cautions us, **I Jn. 4:1** Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world ... That is how important it is to look into the Scriptures and discover the benchmark for determining what is of God and what is not ... Thy Word is truth (Jn. 17:17) ... **Ps. 12:6** The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.

Hundreds of years earlier Isaiah wrote to the people in his day, **Is. 8:19** And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead? **20** To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. ... In other words, you will find the *correct* answers in the Word of God ... and you don't take bits from here and bits from there to make your point because you could end up with error ... instead, you honour the Word of God by taking it all and studying it as a whole in order to find what God is saying.

That is what John records the Saviour said, **Jn. 8:12** Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. Previously, John had written in his introduction to the Gospel, **Jn. 1:1** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** The same was in the beginning with God ... **4** In him was life; and the life was the light of men. **5** And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. ... The darkness could not and cannot extinguish the light ... and that is the same light which is the inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of God in all its wonderful and glorious truth.

And that is how you determine/reveal the difference between someone who is a believer and someone who isn't. The Word of God explains the work of salvation, and the issues concerning our faith. They are matters true believers

hold precious because the Holy Spirit is our Teacher to show us these things, as Jesus said He would, **Jn. 16:13** *Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth ... and also as the Psalmist said, Ps. 119: 130* The entrance of thy words giveth light.

And that means if you cannot see the light ... it is because you are still in the darkness! Spiritually-speaking, where there is no light, the Lord Jesus is not present ... for if He was, - since He is the Light, He would cancel out the darkness.

Darkness, - spiritual darkness, - describes the condition of the people of Israel, even though they had so many privileges granted to them by the Lord down through the ages. For example, God had chosen them out of all the nations, - they were the only people who were selected and honoured to see the light of the *shekinah* glory that accompanied God's presence. They were also the only people to whom He had given His holy Word, the Old Testament Scriptures ... with the Law of Moses and the writings and the prophets. They had the covenants which included the covenants God had made with Abraham, and David, and the promise of the New Covenant. God had kept them as His own special people ... as He said through Zechariah 2:8, *For thus saith the LORD of hosts; After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled [plundered] you: for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye.*

... And yet, - even with all these privileges afforded to no other nation, - the people of Israel had deviated from God and perverted His ways ... And that is how they turned out blind! They had closed their hearts and minds to the truth of God until their generations had become irreparably damaged!

Now, can't you see how such a spiritual disability encroaches upon us all? ... It affects the way we think ... just as it was doing away back in the times of Jesus. And Paul is very convinced as to how we got ourselves into such a state. He explained how **Rom. 1:19** ... that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. **20** For the invisible things [*for example, His glory, justice, righteousness, holiness*] of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse. However, this light that God shone to make known His glory was rejected, - it was shunned and denied, **21** Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but

became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. ... They shut the light out!

They ‘blinded the windows, pulled the curtains, and barricaded the doors’ so as to make sure the Gospel light God was shining would be kept out, and not allowed in! Why did they do that? Well, they did that out of stubbornness and denial of God’s authority because they were ²² *Professing themselves to be wise, while actually, they became fools.* ... And as fools, what did they say? ... They say, *Ps. 14:1 & 53:1 The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God ...* And because they say there is no God, *Ps. 36:1 ... there is no fear of God before his eyes.*

Consequently, they change the glory of the incorruptible, immortal, and sinless God (Rom. 1:23), and they deviate so far from His truth they turn it into a lie, and they become fascinated and caught up with worshipping the ‘God’ they constructed out of their own empty and vain imaginations (Rom. 1:25). They become engrossed and intoxicated with all their ‘discoveries’ which deny God. And it is at that stage God says ‘Enough!’, and He ‘hands them over’ to all kinds of vile and perverse pursuits (Rom. 1:26). ... They ‘shut out the light’ and it is like what happened here in Mk. 8:13, *And he left them.*

That is what spiritual blindness does, - it closes out the light, and makes us to prefer remaining in the darkness! And that is where these religious Pharisees were, as Jesus said in Jn. 3:19 *And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.* ... They were so used to the darkness, they did not want to know the light! And, as Job said, *Job 12:25 They grope in the dark without light, and he maketh them to stagger like a drunken man.* ...

And these religious leaders had *grossly infected* the Jewish people by withholding the spiritual light of the Old Testament, - the Word of God in those days, *Lk. 19:41 And when he [Jesus] was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, 42 Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.* ... They were imprisoned and confined within the darkness!

Because of the false teachings and false gospels being propagated in Jerusalem, religious spiritual *blindness* was the norm, and it was preventing

the people from recognising Jesus Christ as the Messiah! ... Does that not also ring true for our own times ... when, in their pulpits, religious men and women withhold the light of the Gospel from being preached, and as a result, vast multitudes of people remain in a perpetual state of spiritual blindness for they are not being taught the truth of the Word of God, and the Gospel light of true and free salvation by grace is being denied them! ... And they are scurrying on their way towards a lost eternity in Hell!

Now, in his account Matthew tells us there were also Sadducees present (Mt. 16:1-12). This is the final time Jesus would be confronted by the Pharisees and the Sadducees in this region of Galilee because He is soon going to Jerusalem, and to the cross. This is, therefore, a defining time ... It is coming near the end of the opportunities for these people.

And, also, the opposition to the Saviour is increasing, and He is becoming more vilified and discredited in their eyes. Indeed, it is very much the case, **Jn. 1:11** He came unto his own, and his own received him not. He was attracting increasing confrontation ... and all many of them wanted to do was to kill Him! ... Remember, too, how He has been 'out of the scene' for a while for He has been up in the regions of Tyre and Sidon, and then He has been down the eastern coast of the Sea of Galilee, in Decapolis. ... But as soon as He is back in Jewish Galilee, 'they are at Him'!

And in the time He has been away the enemy has taken the opportunity to devise their plans of opposition and they confronted Him with a renewed vigour. ... And the Pharisees and the Sadducees would not be on the same side! The Pharisees were the legalists and the Sadducees would have been the liberals ... They were 'miles apart' from each other in so many different ways, but you will always find the enemies unite, - opposites attract, - when it comes to confronting Christ and His people. So they set their disagreements aside to concentrate on getting rid of Jesus.

That is the way darkness works, though. People in the darkness are happiest with other people in the darkest. ... Have you ever noticed, - maybe in work or some other place, - that as a Christian you are often the outsider? Other people from very different backgrounds, - with seemingly so little in common, - can manage fairly well to strike up a conversation and 'get on', but they tend 'to keep their distance' when they know you are a Christian. ... Darkness does not attract light ... darkness simply attracts more darkness!

So, both the Sadducees and the Pharisees collectively begin to argue (συζητέω, dispute) with Jesus, - they arrogantly came straight up to Him and demanded **Mk. 8:11** ... a sign from heaven, tempting him. As far as they were concerned, *that* would prove whether He was real or fake because Jewish superstition held that God could do heavenly miracles whereas demons could only manage earthly miracles ... so they required a sign from Heaven. ... They wanted more than people being healed because, after all, that is what they accused Him of earlier, **Mk. 3:22** And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils. No, they wanted something to happen in the sky ... maybe something spectacular with the moon and the sun and stars ... maybe planets appearing together. That is what they wanted ... but Jesus was not going to ‘dance to their tune’, **Mk. 8:12** And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and saith, Why doth this generation seek after a sign? verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation.

But, if they had been following Jesus, - without any of the baggage of their opposition and hostility, - they would have noticed by now Jesus came from God ... and surely *that* was Heavenly! ... However, the spiritual darkness in which they were encased would not be penetrated because they were too stubborn to ‘unbelieve’ all the misconceptions and delusions they had formulated about Him in their own minds. ... Jesus was already condemned, as far as they were concerned, and they would not allow anything He did or say to contradict or undermine their self-deception.

Indeed, the more evidence they were given, - and they heard from others, - the deeper they were determined to sink further into their darkness. ... Jesus had healed multitudes, and he had worked miracles on a scale beyond their comprehension ... but *still* there was no way they were going to believe! Despite all the evidence, *they would not believe!*

And so Jesus plainly told them, **12** And he sighed deeply in his spirit [*ἀναστενάζω, i.e. He was so frustrated!*], ... What a difficult time Jesus has with us?! ... On another occasion when He was surrounded by the multitudes, and a man came and fell down before Him ... the man was ‘at the end of his tether’, and he cried, **Mt. 17:15** Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatick [*epileptic*], and sore vexed: for oftentimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water. **16** And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him. **17** Then Jesus answered and said, Q faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? ... And then on another occasion when He was surrounded by the

multitudes, and a man cried out to Him, **Mk. 9 17** ... Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; **18** And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not. **19** He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?..... And now here is another occasion when these reprobate Pharisees and Sadducees had collaborated against Him ... and *[He]* saith, Why doth this generation seek after a sign? ... What else can be done to make you see it?! ... verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation. ... *You have had it!*

They do not want to see ... so Jesus gave them what they wanted, i.e. spiritual blindness. They did not want to recognise Him as the Messiah, so He abandoned them to their blindness. That is an awful predicament to be in ... but they did not realise it! ... It is what God had done to their predecessors in the Old Testament, for example, He would not allow any of the people who were twenty years old and upwards when they had left Egypt to enter the Promised Land, except Caleb and Joshua. God judges!

... And Jesus was also judging these Pharisees and Sadducees ... Look at the severity of their condition in the parallel account in Matthew's Gospel, **Mt. 16:1** The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would shew them a sign from heaven. **2** He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. **3** And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times? **4** A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And he left them, and departed. ... You are clever enough to know your sciences, and you reckon you know what keeps the world and the universe going but you have no idea and no knowledge of the relationship through God's grace that He instigated because He loves your nation, and your people, **Jn. 3:17** For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

And notice the sad conclusion, **Mk. 8:13** And he left them, and entering into the ship again departed to the other side. ... That was it. No more was to be said. He never met them again because He would soon be on His final journey to Jerusalem and the cross.

It is tragic how people who are given the opportunity to believe, - to enter into the light of the Gospel, - reject it and keep on choosing the darkness. They will do anything but come to Christ and receive Him as Saviour ... even those who are privileged to be brought up in a Christian family or a Christian nation.

He is the Light of the world, and yet they choose to walk away from Him ... and when you walk away from the light, you are walking into and choosing the darkness!

Yes, surely, they can gather around them all types of religion, philosophies and superstitions but yet continue to reject the light of God's Gospel of free and sovereign grace. ... It is the only light that never goes out! ... And yet the people who reject the Light are the blind who are determined they will never see. They are obsessed with the darkness, and they are not prepared to leave their darkness, and one day the Lord will consign them forever to that which they want ... eternal darkness ... a place where there is no light, and where there never again will be light. Here is what Peter wrote, **II Peter 2:4** For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment ... ⁶ ... making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly. ... To those who continue in darkness ... they will be in darkness forever! They have chosen not to have the light, the Light of the Gospel!

But that is what happens when the sun, - Son, - continues to be rejected ... you remain in the darkness. There is only one form of light that takes you out and keeps you and it is this, - we referred to it at the beginning of our study, **II Cor. 4:** ... the light of the glorious gospel of Christ. ... He Himself has said, **Jn. 8:12** I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. ... And He is also the only Light in Heaven, **Rev. 21:23** And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. In fact, He is the source of all light because at the very beginning we are told, **Gen. 1:3** God said, Let there be light: and there was light. ... From Genesis through to Revelation He is the Light that keeps on shining ... brighter than all others ... and there is no fear of that Light ever going out!

We can look up into the clear sky at night and see the lights millions of miles away, - that is how bright God has made them ... but the light of the Gospel is even far brighter ... as the hymn writer describes ...

No darkness have we
Who in Jesus abide;
The Light of the world is Jesus!
We walk in the light
When we follow our Guide!
The Light of the world is Jesus!