

## Do You See Anything?

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Mark 8:22-26

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Manoj Yadav [was born] with blinding cataracts. In developed countries, a simple surgery cures this disabling eye affliction within the first few months of life. But like the vast majority of people in India, Manoj was born in a village, with limited access to health care. His parents are poor and uneducated. They didn't even realize their infant son was blind until he began to bump into things while crawling. Years later, when regional doctors examined Manoj, they told him he would never see. "So we gave up," recalls Manoj, now 22. "We thought there was no point in running around anymore trying to find treatment."

Then in 2011, a team of eye specialists from New Delhi visited Manoj's village in Uttar Pradesh. They screened him and other blind children and kindled hope that Manoj might someday be able to see after all. That year, he and his father took a 13-hour train journey to India's capital. There, a surgeon excised his cataract-ridden lenses and placed synthetic ones in their place.

When the doctors removed the bandages a day later, Manoj's world was filled with light and shapes that, to him, were incomprehensible. He couldn't tell people from objects, or where one thing ended and another began. His brain, deprived of information from his eyes for 18 years, didn't know what to make of the flood of visual stimuli. But over the coming months, his brain gradually learned to interpret the signals it was receiving from his eyes, and the blurry and confusing world began to come into focus.<sup>1</sup>

The Bible is full of language about blindness. The psalmist, Asaph, says, "[The wicked] have neither knowledge nor understanding, they walk about in darkness" Psalm 82:5. Solomon said, "The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble" Proverbs 4:19. Jeremiah said, "Hear this, O foolish and senseless people, who have eyes, but do not see" Jeremiah 5:21. Blindness, darkness, and lack of understanding characterize our sinful human nature. The problem is not a lack of ample light, the problem is the inability of untouched eyes to see and follow that light to a fuller light.

Let's turn our attention to the text before us this morning. Mark, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, pens the following words:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2015/10/feature-giving-blind-people-sight-illuminates-brain-s-secrets>

*And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand and 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 look like trees, walking." Then 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." Mark 8:22–26*

Brothers and sisters, "The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever" Isaiah 40:8.

Mark 8:22-26 is one of the more striking accounts in all the Gospels. The story in front of us this morning is the only canonical story in which Jesus heals an individual but is not immediately successful. While Jesus restored the man's sight in full, He does it in two successive stages and a second touch is necessary. What are we to make of this? In order to answer that question, we need to understand that the text in front of us is a little like a Russian doll. There is, in these five verses, a story within a story or a parable within a miracle. Jesus will encounter the blind man and restore his sight, but this miracle stands as a living sermon to Jesus' disciples concerning their own spiritual nearsightedness. The disciples, though they were the closest in proximity to Jesus' life and ministry, struggled to see and understand who Jesus was and for what purpose He has come. Numerous times already in the gospel of Mark, Jesus has rebuked His disciples for their lack of understanding.

After Jesus taught the parable of the sower, He said to His disciples, "Do you not understand this parable? How will you understand all the parables (4:13)? When Jesus calmed the storm and the disciples were ghastly afraid, He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith (4:40, 6:50)? When Jesus taught that a person is defiled not by what goes into him, but rather by what comes out of his heart, the disciples were confused and Jesus said, "Are you also without understanding? Do you not see..." (7:18). Finally, last week, as Jesus taught the disciples about the leaven (infectious teaching) of the Pharisees all these fellas could think about was bread. Jesus again asked His disciples, "Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? Do you not yet understand?" (8:17-18, 21). This is the context with which our present story concerning the blind man comes to us.

Let's first look at Jesus' interaction with the blind man and then we'll circle back to the meaning this has for the disciples and us.

## **I. JESUS GIVES SIGHT TO PHYSICAL EYES.**

### **A. Friends bring the blind man to Jesus lovingly (v.22)**

*And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him.*

Jesus and His disciples have arrived in Bethsaida, on the northeast shore of the sea of Galilee. They are on their way up to Caesarea Philippi where the transfiguration will take place. But here in Bethsaida, Jesus encounters a blind man. Blindness was incredibly common in the ancient Near East. Lack of understanding regarding hygiene, the unavailability of effective medicine, and exposure to the harsh elements and domestic trauma left many blind. Clouded, staring, fly-swarmed eyes were common wherever one went in Jesus' day.<sup>2</sup> But for every difficulty this man faced as a result of his blindness, he had one thing going for him – good friends who bring him to Jesus and beg Him to touch him. The word Mark uses is actually more intimate than our translation. Mark notes that these friends “carry” (φέρω - pherō) the blind man to Jesus and “beg,” (παρακαλέω - parakaleō) literally “to urge Jesus to come alongside” him.

These friends carry their buddy to the only One they know of that can restore this man's sight. It's very likely that this group of friends had been present at other times when Jesus had ministered a healing touch and so they come seeking the same. It's also very possible that they shared the superstitious understanding of a deity's touch – such was common in the day. But nonetheless, here they are with their friend in tow.

Many of you can probably remember the person who loved you enough to bring you, in your blindness, to Jesus. They sat down with you and opened the Scriptures. They shared the glorious gospel (good news) with you that your sins, though they are like scarlet and red crimson, they can be washed as white as snow by the blood of Jesus (cf. Isaiah 1:18). They didn't give up on you when you refused to listen, but kept loving you to the cross. If you have a person like that in your life, write their name in the margin of your notes. I want to encourage you to thank God for that person. Thank them for their persistence. Thank God for their obedience. Now, ask God to make you like them. Ask Him to make you a person who carries those in your sphere of influence to Jesus. Beg God, in prayer, that He might remove their spiritual blindness and give them new eyes to see the light of the gospel in Jesus Christ. Pray 2 Corinthians 4:6, “For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

## **B. Jesus ministers to the man individually (v.23a)**

*And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village,*

Notice that Jesus takes the man out of the village. Why do you suppose he does this? I think Jesus takes the blind man away from town so He isn't swarmed with a stampede of sick people. Jesus was compassionate and His heart was undoubtedly heavy for the sick, but His chief mission was always pinnacle in His mind. Jesus came first and foremost to cure souls, not bodies. It does a person no good to be cured of a temporal, physical malady if the state of his soul is

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<sup>2</sup> Kent R. Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant and Savior vol.1* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1989), 193.

doomed to destruction. To be saved from blindness is wonderful, but to be saved from sin is better altogether. Get ahold of sinners by the hand if you wish to get ahold of their heart.

### **C. Jesus ministers to the man uniquely (v.23b-24)**

*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 look like trees, walking."*

Jesus healed a number of blind individuals throughout the gospels, and He used diverse methods. In Matthew 9, two blind men regained their sight when Jesus simply touched their eyes. In Matthew 12, we read that Jesus healed a blind and mute man but we're not told how. In Mark 10, a blind man named Bartimaeus could see after Jesus simply spoke a word. In John 9, a man who was born blind was healed after Jesus spat on the ground to make some mud and then this mud was put on his eyes. Later, this man gave a one-sentence summary of his transformation in John 9:25 saying, "One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."

It's interesting to note that the two primary purposes for laying on of hands in the Old Covenant were to transfer animals or persons from the profane to the sacred by consecrating (offering) them to God. When Jesus lays hands on people the effect is rather the opposite, however, for the profane is no longer elevated to the sacred, as in the OT, but rather by bestowing God's holy and healing presence on ordinary, common, and even sinful people, Jesus brings the sacred to the profane.<sup>3</sup>

It's also interesting to note that when Jesus performs a miracle, he normally makes an authoritative word or makes a pronouncement. But that's not the case in this instance. Here, after Jesus performs the first stage of His miracle, He asks a question. Look at verse 23. Jesus asks, "Do you see anything?" Jesus didn't ask because He didn't know the answer to that question. I think Jesus asks this question for two reasons. First, to incite faith in the blind man. Imagine seeing a ray of light after having been blind. His excitement must have been through the roof. Secondly, for the disciples, Jesus' question appears to be an echo of his questions in the previous passage, "Do you still not perceive or understand?"

Jesus could have healed the blind man any way He wanted. And he could have done it instantaneously. But instead, He chose to do it uniquely. Jesus applies a small amount of warm saliva to the man's eyes and lays His hands on him. What a tender picture of How the Lord works. When Jesus removes His hands, He asks, "Do you see anything?" *And the man looked up and said, "I see people, but they look like trees, walking."* He could see, but not clearly. That will come in the next verse. What are we to learn from this instance?

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<sup>3</sup> James R. Edwards, *PNTC: The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 243.

Think about the number of ways God has saved individuals in this room. Everyone is saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, but God uses a number of circumstances and creates an endless number of unique stories when he saves a person. His thoughts are not our thoughts and His ways are not our ways (cf. Isaiah 55:8-9). God is consistent in His nature and character, but He isn't cookie cutter. This reminds us that you can't put God in a box. Jesus' healing miracles were often brought about using different methods. He healed one leper by touching him. He healed a group of ten lepers by speaking to them. Sometimes Jesus would go where the sick were, other times the sick were brought to Him. Sometimes Jesus went and touched the sick, other times Jesus would heal from a distance.

How did God open your blind eyes? Some of us might have very dramatic conversion stories. Others stories may be much less sensational. But in any case, when Jesus gives you spiritual eyes and changes your heart, it's a miracle with a capital "M".

#### **D. Jesus ministers to the man effectively (v.25)**

*Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.*

As to the nature of the man's condition in 8:22–26, it would appear that the man was once able to see but had gone blind at some point in his life. This seems evident because when he was partially healed, he seemed to understand what trees look like (v.24). At the first stage of his healing, the man appears still to have a severe case of nearsightedness, with things at any distance looking quite blurry. But Jesus touches him a second time and heals him fully (v.25). The word translated "clearly" is the Greek adverb "τηλαυγῶς." It's a compound of the word from *tēle*, which means "afar" and *augē*, which means "radiance". Together they have the idea of "far-shining."

We need to note that when Jesus touches the blind man's eyes a second time it wasn't because the first time was insufficient. Elsewhere Jesus performs more difficult miracles, at least from a human perspective, without fail. Consider the Garasene demoniac (cf. 5:1-20), or raising the dead girl (cf. 5:35-43).

The two-stage cure in the present miracle thus suggests a process or progression of revelation to the disciples. Jesus had already asked them about their vision of Him (v.18). He was now leading them by the hand to the point at which their sight would become much clearer, and Peter would confess "You are the Christ" (v.29). Their spiritual understanding did not come instantaneously, but gradually. They, too, needed the second touch from the hands of their Master."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Sinclair Ferguson, *Let's Study Mark*, 125.

## E. Jesus issues a strong warning (v.26)

*And he sent him to his home, saying, "Do not even enter the village."*

Bethsaida is not just any town. It was a city that had had high exposure to Jesus. It was among the cities where Jesus had performed the greatest number of His miracles. But sadly, for all the light the city of Bethsaida had received, a hard-heartedness and refusal to repent was all that remained. In Matthew 11:21-22, Jesus speaks strong words of judgment on Bethsaida saying, "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you."

Jesus was just in Tyre and Sidon at the end of Mark 7. This is where He encountered the Syrophenician woman whose daughter had an unclean spirit. Remember, Tyre and Sidon was a predominantly Gentile, pagan region. Those two cities were notoriously wicked and well-known for their idol worship, rampant crime, prostitution, violence, profanity, greed, and injustice.

Bethsaida, on the other hand, was a Jewish city, proud of its religious heritage, and proud of its religious loyalty. It was a synagogue town that people traveled to in order to worship and sacrifice to YHWH. But yet Jesus says, "Judgment will be incalculably worse for the inhabitants of Bethsaida than it will be for the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon." Why? Because Bethsaida had been exposed to such spiritual Light in comparison to Tyre and Sidon but, for all they witnessed, they remained blind and unrepentant.

Jesus' denying the man the right to go back and tell the town of Bethsaida what had happened to him is to emphasize the reality and seriousness of the curse on that city. It is to be a reminder to the blind man, his friends, and the disciples that they need to understand the grace, compassion and tender touch of Jesus, but they need to understand judgment as well. Because of Bethsaida's lack of repentance when they had such exposure to Christ, they'll have a far greater punishment at the judgment seat.

There is a clear warning to all of us in verse 26. The warning is this: do not reject the light of Christ. Do not reject His word. Do not put off repentance. Do not dismiss the current opportunity to be saved from the wrath to come. If we are exposed to the Light and refuse to repent, Jesus may very well say, "Enough," and turn out the Light. Friends, today is the day of salvation. Joseph Hart penned the words to a hymn in 1759 titled *Come Ye Sinners, Poor, and Needy*.

*Come, ye sinners, poor and needy,  
Weak and wounded, sick and sore;  
Jesus ready stands to save you,  
Full of pity, love and pow'r.*

*Come, ye weary, heavy-laden,  
Lost and ruined by the fall;  
If you tarry till you're better,  
You will never come at all.*

## II. JESUS GIVES SIGHT TO SPIRITUAL EYES.

If you go back to the beginning of Mark 8, we see the miracle of the feeding of the 4,000 (v.1-10). Immediately afterwards, the Pharisees came to argue with him (v.11-12). After Jesus and the disciples got into a boat, he warned them to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees (v.15). Leaven is another word for the yeast necessary for baking bread, but in this case it refers to the false teaching of the Pharisees. But the disciples thought He was talking about literal bread. Jesus then rebuked the disciples by saying, "Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember?" (v.18). Or we could paraphrase it this way, "How can you be so blind after having been with me so long? Don't you understand anything I'm saying?"

This passage should be understood as containing symbolic truth. It explains how slowly and gradually the disciples were comprehending the truth concerning Jesus. But it also suggests the gradual nature of a Christian's growth in Christ. Immediately the man saw whereas he had been totally blind. But he saw indistinctly or without clarity. However, as a result of his further experience with Jesus, he saw all things clearly and even at a distance. Let us be clear: A person is saved in a moment. Crossing from darkness to light takes place in an instant. But as babes in Christ, our spiritual vision isn't yet clear. As we go on growing in grace and knowledge of Christ, we come to see clearly and even afar. No Christian should be content merely to see. We should let Christ develop us until we see with distinct vision. Then we shall see through the eyes of the Lord.<sup>5</sup>

### A. Spiritual Blindness

Sinners are by nature blind (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:4; 1 John 2:11; John 9:39). The Holy Spirit must open blind eyes to show the sinner his condition, his danger, and to lead him to *look* on Him whom he has pierced. Yet, at first, he sees indistinctly. He does not soon learn to distinguish objects. When converted, he is in a new world. Light is shed on every object, and he sees the Scriptures, the Savior, and the works of creation, the sun, and stars, and hills, and vales, in a new light. He sees the beauty of the plan of salvation, and wonders that he has not seen it before. Yet he sees at first indistinctly. It is only by repeated applications to the Source of Light that he sees all things clearly. At first, religion may appear full of mysteries. Doctrines and facts appear on every hand that he cannot fully comprehend. His mind is still perplexed, and he may doubt whether he has ever seen aught, or has been ever renewed. Yet let him not despair. Light, in due time, will be shed on these obscure and mysterious truths. Faithful and repeated application to the Father of Lights in prayer, and in searching the Scriptures, and in the ordinances of religion, will dissipate all these doubts, and he will see all things clearly, and the universe will appear to be filled with one broad flood of light.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Herschel H. Hobbs, *An Exposition of the Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1970), 121.

<sup>6</sup> Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament* (Altamonte Springs: OakTree Software, 2006), paragraph 3623.

## B. Cloudy Spiritual vision

Conversion is an illumination, a change from darkness to light, from blindness to seeing the Kingdom of God. Yet few converted people see things distinctly at first. The nature and proportion of doctrines, practices, and ordinances of the gospel are dimly seen by them, and imperfectly understood. They are like the man before us, who at first saw men as trees walking. Their vision is dazzled and unaccustomed to the new world into which they have been introduced. It is not until the work of the Spirit has become deeper and their experience been somewhat matured that they see all things clearly. This is the history of thousands of God's children. They begin with seeing men as trees walking, they end with seeing all clearly.<sup>7</sup>

The story contains three compounds of the verb βλέπω, which means "to see". The first, ἀναβλέπω, is translated "looking up," meaning he "regained sight." The second, διαβλέπω, has the idea of "looking through," as a mist or fog. Paul says, "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known" 1 Corinthians 13:12. The third use of βλέπω is the word ἐμβλέπω, which has the idea of "looking into and seeing clearly." John tells us, "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is" 1 John 3:2.

## C. Clear Spiritual vision

J.C. Ryle once wrote, "Let us look forward and take comfort. The time comes when we shall see all "clearly." The night is far spent. The day is at hand. Let us be content to wait, and watch, and work, and pray. When the day of the Lord comes, our spiritual eyesight will be perfected. We shall see as we have been seen, and know as we have been known."<sup>8</sup>

Peter encourages us saying, "Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation" 1 Peter 2:2. As we grow, our spiritual sight will become clearer and our worship will become deeper! Question: Do you have spiritual vision? Is your spiritual vision cloudy or clear?

## CLOSING BENEDICTION

Hear this benediction as we bring our corporate worship to a close this morning. The psalmist writes, "The LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous" Psalm 146:8. And all God's people said, "Amen!" Go in peace!

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<sup>7</sup> J.C. Ryle, *Mark: Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2012), 128.

<sup>8</sup> Ryle, 128-129.