

Tell John...The Blind See. (Mark 8:11-26)

The universal evidence for Jesus' miracles was so abundant the Pharisees didn't even try to deny or discredit them. So, here's how they dealt with Jesus' miracles; they said that He did them by the power of the devil. This became the official religious position concerning Jesus. He was the devil incarnate. Therefore every new miracle was a new impetus to stop the demon.¹

John the Baptist, asked Jesus from prison, "*Are you the Expected One or should we look for another?*" Among other things Jesus said to tell John that *the blind receive* back their sight.

By healing the paralytic, Jesus wasn't merely claiming the ability to do miracles. He didn't do them just for us to believe that Jesus could do the miraculous. His miracles validated His claim to be God with us. *Before He healed the paralytic*, He said, "*My son, your sins are forgiven.*" Because all sin is ultimately against God, only God can forgive sins. To tell someone, "I forgive you for all of your sins," is a claim to divinity. How can anyone forgive someone's sins that they committed against someone else, unless ultimately that sin is against them? They all knew what Jesus was claiming! They charged Him with blasphemy. He was assuming prerogatives that only belong to God, which was a capital crime. Jesus knew that healing the lame man would cast the shadow of the cross over the rest of his ministry. In fact, every time he healed someone it validated His claim to be God among us and further sealed his adversaries' hatred and murderous designs.

I want to organize Jesus' healing of this blind man (Mark 8:11-26) around three ways Jesus healed this man of his blindness. First, I want you to see how personal and tender Jesus was with this man. Second, He heals him in stages. Third, The man's healing will mean Jesus' own death.

OK. First, Jesus could not have been more personal or tender (8:22-23).

Context: Spiritual Blindness

Now, like many miracles, this one comes to us in a context where its purpose is to complement and seal what Jesus was teaching at the moment. Just as the healing of the paralytic illustrated our great need to be healed from our spiritual paralysis, so this healing illustrates our need to be healed from our spiritual blindness. These healings are not isolated *random* acts of mercy and kindness. There is no such thing. They point to something more eternal than our physical illnesses.

¹ The analogy is imperfect - of course - but some today look at America and the benevolent work America does and they see a great demon deserving only of being destroyed. That's not a political judgment; it's a religious one.

Just the day before, Jesus fed four thousand people who had stayed to hear him teach past dinnertime. After the disciples (with only seven loaves) handed enough out for everyone to eat there were seven loaves left over.

When the crowds went home Jesus and the disciples made their way across the lake. The Pharisees then asked Jesus to do another trick for them. He refused. And while crossing the lake a second time, Jesus tells his disciples to watch out for the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.

In the ancient world, leaven was a common metaphor for corruption. So Jesus was saying, *“Look out for the spiritual corruption of the Pharisees and the material or worldly corruption of Herod.”* Herod wanted to achieve great success and popularity through his massive building projects that drew thousands to Jerusalem and turn Israel’s religious heritage into a huge commercial success like Solomon. It was hard to argue with such success but in both cases it led to vain extravagances and spiritual corruption. Jesus says, *“Beware of the spiritual corruption of the Pharisees and the social corruption of Herod.”*

Now, this goes right over the heads of the disciples. Do you know why? They are preoccupied! While Jesus is talking about this abstract spiritual stuff they were worried (v.14). They only brought one loaf to feed thirteen hungry men. What Jesus said about the Pharisees and Herod went in one ear and out the other. Did your parents ever say that to you?

Have you ever become so preoccupied with the immediate and the material that you don’t hear the words of Jesus in your souls? The job, the bills, the stock market, the lawn, the house, the car, the car seat, the tires, that front end alignment, the medications, dinner, and what are we going to wear can capture all of your attention. Now remember Jesus just fed four thousand people with seven loaves of bread. But that compassion was quickly forgotten. Preoccupied by immediate concerns, His disciples got distracted. What is it that captures your gaze, and focus? What are you looking at throughout the day? Can you remember What Elisha and his servant saw when they were under attack by Syria? Behind the veil that separates heaven and earth they saw the chariots of the Lord and that more were for the than those who were against them. What do you see?

So, in v.17, Jesus says, “Why are you so concerned with the bread? Do you not yet SEE or understand? Are your hearts so blind to spiritual realities that you can’t see who is sitting in front of you and teaching you? Having eyes do you not see? Having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember what just happened two days ago? I fed four thousand hungry people and now you are so anxious about where you are going to get you next meal. Come on friends open your eyes to Me and my great love and care for you.

Now, their hearts were not hardened with hatred and murderous intent like that of the Pharisees. But, they did have a hard wall of doubt, anxiety, fear and worry that kept the light of Jesus' power and love from shining on their souls. So, He asked them in v.20, "*When I broke the five loaves to feed the five thousand how many full baskets were left over? (Twelve) How many full baskets were left over after the feeding of the four thousand?*" How about us? Are we so preoccupied with our immediate concerns that we are blinded to greater realities?

Now we come to the miracle. This man's physical blindness is a living parable of the spiritual blindness of the Pharisees and the disciples. The way Jesus heals him is a parable of the way Jesus heals our spiritual blindness. How does Jesus do it?

First, Jesus' healing is tender and deeply personal. (8:22-23)

"When they got across the lake at Bethsaida some brought a blind man to Jesus and they begged Jesus to touch him. Taking the man by the hand, He brought him out of the village; and after spitting on his eyes and laying His hands upon him, He asked him, "Do you see anything?" (vv.22-23)

First, notice that those who bring the blind man to Jesus want Jesus to simply touch the man. Now, that has a ring of magic to it. Like Aladdin's lamp, if you just rub it right and say the right words and that should do it. It just sounds too mechanical and impersonal to me. Their faith is fragmented and imperfect. But it is an expression of dependence. They were still blind to what Jesus is about. But as He was with the paralytic, Jesus was aggressive with His grace.

What does Jesus do? He takes him by the hand. Jesus holds his hand as He leads him out of the village and away from the crowds.

I've told you this story before, but I like telling it so I'll tell it again. One of my teammates on our college track team was Mike Boit who won the bronze medal in the 800 meters in the Munich Olympic Games. Mike grew up in Kenya with lots of brothers and sisters (His father had several wives). After his Olympic success he came and ran for our team in New Mexico. In the spring we would travel to all the major relay races across the country. Kansas, Drake, Mount Sac. and Texas Relays, to name a few. While warming up for an event at Texas Relays, Mike asked me if I wanted to jog a few quarter miles to loosen up for the race. I said, "Sure." Then as we were walking across the football field to the track, in front of several thousand people and the Longhorn football team, Mike takes hold my hand to hold it as we walked across the field. In Kenya, this was perfectly normal for close friends, but way beyond my comfort zone. So, I let go. I could see his disappointment. He felt rejected. I said, "Mike. I love you like a brother. But, you just have to know. I'm not holding your hand in the center of Longhorn Stadium in front of several thousand Texas fans."

Jesus held this man's hand as He led him out of the village. He didn't have to. He could have healed him and let him walk out alone. Why did Jesus lead him by the hand out of the village before He healed him? My guess is He didn't want a circus atmosphere to start up (cf. ch.7). He wanted the man to see Him. He wanted the man's attention on Him and not the crowds. Why spit in his eyes? Elsewhere Jesus mixed his spit with dirt to heal. It doesn't say. Maybe it had something to do with God's work of creation. Maybe He wanted to use ordinary means instead of spectacular means like a golden wand. He doesn't need a magic stick. His spit and some dirt will do. He doesn't want the focus to shift to devices. He wants to touch and heal this man in a relationship through the touch of a personal encounter. He wants the man to know that The one who gave him back his sight was the same one who held his hand and took him away from the pressing crowds, touched him, rubbed his eyes and established personal contact.

Psalm 139:7-19:

I love that place in Ps.139: where David asks, *'Where can I go from your Spirit or flee from your presence. If I ascend to heaven you are there. If I descend to Sheol you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn or settle on the far side of the sea...EVEN THERE YOUR HAND WILL LEAD ME AND YOUR RIGHT HAND WILL HOLD ME FAST.'* When Jesus gave this man his hand he gave him the Hand that made the sea and the dry land. It was the Hand that held back the waters of the Red Sea while Israel passed safely through. It was the Hand that blessed Jacob and wounded him at the same time. With a hand we work, hug, caress, we play an instrument, and point the way. With the hand we lift a child in the air, stroke the brow of a dying mother, open the car door for a wife, mow a yard, pick a flower, paint a picture, give a gift, receive a gift, clap with joy, defend a friend, save a child from going into the street. With our hands we make sleds out of cardboard boxes and pull our grandkids around the house. Jesus offered the man his hand. *What did this man see with the eyes of his heart before he saw anything with the eye in his head?* Has Jesus taken your hand? Has Jesus pulled you up from the darkness of sin, shame and guilt? Is he leading you with his hand and holding you fast with his right hand? Jesus heals this man through personal help and tender love. That's the way He heals us. When you see Jesus what do you see? Do you see Him taking you by the hand, holding you fast, and leading you along? Or is he distant, removed, way out there taking care of the needs of the world? Jesus took his hand.

Second, He gave the man his sight back in stages (8:23-25)

Again, this miracle is a parable. It illustrates the disciples' need for spiritual healing. Jesus told the disciples to beware of the leaven of Pharisees and Herod. But they were blinded by their fears and worries. They don't yet get the magnitude of who Jesus is. He's not just a miracle worker, not just a political and social liberator or rabbi. He's not a heavenly vending machine to make you

popular, a huge success, and wealthy. Even though they walked with Him, knew Him and believed in Him, the light of Jesus dawns on them gradually in stages. Just like the healing of this man.

If I am right, this is the only healing in Jesus' ministry that happens in stages. The problem isn't with the magnitude of the patient's disease. It wasn't too difficult for Jesus to do. He can stop a hurricane with two words, "Be still." He can raise the dead with a thought. Jesus didn't need more time, concentration or energy. His audience needed a lesson about the progressive nature of regaining spiritual sight. Beloved you just don't get it all at once.

Our spiritual blindness is by nature pervasive. It's broad and deep. Notice everyone is blind: the Pharisees and the disciples both. Ancient dualism said that the world is divided up between the good and the bad and the yin and the yang. Dualism teaches that the religious are good the non-religious are bad; our race is good your race is bad; our nationality is good and yours is bad. This is the foundation for genocide. Christianity will have none of this. Christianity teaches that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Romans one says that no one does good, as God defines goodness. By nature, all of us are spiritually blind as bats. Blind to the real authority of God, the justice of God, the goodness of God, the love of God, plans of God by nature without grace we are all blind.

Our blindness also runs very deep. So, it takes a lot of time and process to see clearly spiritually. Even when our spiritual sight clears up enough for us to see Jesus and respond to His mercy and to yield to his Lordship our sight is still not cleared up enough for us to live the life we should be living. Spiritual sight does not come all at once.

Jesus healed this man in stages. After spitting on his eyes and laying His hands on him He asked him, "Do you see anything?" (8:24) "He answered, *"I see men but they look like trees walking around."* Then *again* Jesus laid His hands upon his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored and began to see everything clearly."

Look, if you are a growing Christian ten years from now you will look back and think, *"How foolish I was back then to think those things."* You know what that means don't you? That means that you're a fool today. I'm just saying what you're going to feel ahead of time. Why? Because spiritual sight is a process of growing in sight and understanding.

The disciples are blind to Jesus' commitment to take care of them and feed them. They don't hear his lesson about the Pharisees and Herod. But Jesus doesn't write them off. He's not done with them. He doesn't throw them out of the boat. He's not done with me because I'm slow to get it. Their insight into His awesome Being, His sovereignty, His love, His suffering, and His grace will grow; they'll get

it. But we're slow learners and some are slower in some areas than others. God doesn't cast you aside because you are a slow learner. We need to follow Peter's model of spiritual insight. Peter's faith takes a long time to get right. Peter was still struggling with racism way past Pentecost when the church in Antioch was dividing on racial issues. The man who said, "Always be ready to give an answer for the hope that is in you," is the man who denied Jesus three times before the cross. Do you think it didn't take a while for Peter to see the light of forgiveness to let that failure go? Not only that, his name would be branded to that failure for every generation to come. How would you like your worst sin to be broadcast throughout the whole church of all ages? Do you think it didn't take some time for John the Baptist to reconcile the fact that Jesus wasn't going to rescue him from prison and death? It takes time for those scales to fall completely off our eyes.

Jesus asked the blind man, "Do you see aright?" He said, "No, not yet. Men look like trees." He's making progress but he's not there yet. Now, it must take some courage to tell Jesus his miracle didn't work. He says, "Sorry, Jesus, you only got the job half done." But if he hadn't been honest he would be going around cutting people down and talking to tree trunks.² The man was honest. "Jesus, it didn't quite work." Look, beloved it's OK to be dissatisfied with your level of spiritual sight. Tell Jesus about what you don't see clearly. Let's be like Jacob and tell God that we won't let go of Him unless He bless us. He may wound you in the process but that's OK. Be patient especially with others. Blind Bartimeus didn't go around clunking other blind people on the head, saying, "How come you can't see?"

Some think that if they don't see everything clearly that God is not working at all. They say, "Oh I wish I could see things more clearly. I don't feel that I love Jesus enough. I want to love Him more." People listen: Unless He loved you, you wouldn't even wish for that. Hunger and thirst for righteousness doesn't stop at conversion.

'Tis not that I did choose thee,
For, Lord, that could not be;
This heart would still refuse thee,
Hadst thou not chosen me.
Thou from the sin that stained me
Hast cleansed and set me free;
Of old thou hast ordained me,
That I should live to thee.¹
Twas sovereign mercy called me
And taught my op'ning mind;
The world had else enthralled me,
To heavenly glories blind.
My heart owns none before thee,
For thy rich grace I thirst;

² I think this is Time Keller's phrase.

This knowing, if I love thee,
Thou must have loved me first.

Our spiritual sight comes to us in stages. God isn't done with you. And he wasn't done with the disciples when they were slow to learn.

Finally, this man's healing will mean Jesus' death v.26

"He sent him home but told him not to even go into his village"

I believe there are seventeen times Jesus tells those He healed not to return or tell anybody about their healing. Why? Because word of what Jesus is capable of would get to the religious and Roman authorities and they would have to kill Him. His miracles validated His claims. His claim was that he was God with us, King and LORD. That was seditious. And that meant His death was inevitable. But, Jesus has more work to do before the cross ...and He wants to slow the process of His execution down.

Here's the point...Every time Jesus uses His redemptive power He is putting the nails in his coffin. His miracle cast the shadow of the cross on his path. Because with every miracle that validated his claim to be God with us his enemies became more and more determined to kill him. These miracles will lead to Jesus' death. Remember what Jesus said to tell John...Go tell John about these things, "The leper is cured, the lame walk and the blind see," which meant that his death was imminent. Didn't John say, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"? John knew what happened to sacrificial lambs. John could put two and two together.

On the cross all the sins and infirmities of man fell on Jesus. For us. He took all our sins and diseases on Himself.

Mk. 15:33 says, "At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. Jesus prayed "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus is quoting a Psalm of David that foretells what the death of Christ would mean for the Christ. It meant that God the Father would turn His loving kindness away from Jesus. The justice of God that we all deserve for our sins would fall on Jesus so that we could be justly forgiven. The physical darkness of those three hours represented the complete spiritual darkness Jesus faced for our sins. For us, The Father would blind the Son to His love and mercy. Why? Because Jesus took the punishment we deserve on Himself in our place. He took our sins and infirmities on Himself in our place. For me to see aright Jesus had to become blind. And He did...and you could never calculate the extent of that love poured out to man. Jesus took the full blows of Gods justice so that all we would have to take are the blows of His love and mercy. Jesus died, the just for the unjust! And there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...

for those who trust in His name. So, what do you see? Do you see His hand reaching out and taking hold of you, leading you, keeping you, holding you fast? Do you see that it is a long journey and a sight that comes in stages? Do you see how Jesus became blind so that you and I could see...really see and behold. If a man is in Christ he is a new creation. The old is passed away and the new has come? What do you see?

No one can ever love you like Jesus.

Holy Spirit, Truth divine,
Dawn upon this soul of mine.
Word of God of inward light,
Wake my spirit,
Clear my sight.