

**Mark 8:22-26<sup>1</sup>**  
***Jesus Helps Us See***

**Introduction**

22 They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him.

23 He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?"

24 He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around."

25 Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.

26 Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't go into the village."

There are two unusual facts about this miracle.

- It is the only time Jesus actually spit on someone. In John 9, when Jesus healed the man born blind, He spat on the ground, mixed the soil with saliva, and then put the mud on the man's eyes. But Mark 8 is notable because it is the only time Jesus ever literally spit on anyone.
- It is the only time Jesus healed someone in two stages.

A few questions we need to answer as we try to understand what the Bible is teaching us here.

**I. Why did Jesus spit on the blind man's eyes?**

There were many customs in ancient Jewish life. One was to spit in response to something especially good. For example, it was customary in ancient Jewish traditions to spit as a pronouncement of healing. In our case today, Jesus might be demonstrating this custom in His miraculous healing of the blind man.

Another custom relating to spitting in ancient Jewish life was to do it in reaction to something especially evil. Upon witnessing, listening, or discovering something bad, it is customary for people to spit to prevent such a tragedy from occurring. It was believed that spitting would protect one from

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<sup>1</sup> 1984 NIV

spiritual evil. In our case today, Jesus might be demonstrating this custom as a denouncement of the spiritual blindness of the man.<sup>2</sup>

But the real mystery of this miracle is that it is a two-stage miracle.

## II. Why did Jesus heal the man in two stages?

After the first stage, the man could see but his vision was very blurry. Only when Jesus touched him a second time could he see clearly. We know that everything Jesus did, He did for a purpose. He never did miracles without any clear purpose in mind. So there must be some purpose in the two-stage healing of this blind man. But the text merely tells the story. It doesn't explain the deeper meaning. And that brings us back to the question, "Why did Jesus heal the blind man in two stages?"

Let's first answer this in the negative.

- It was NOT because of any lack in Jesus, as if He didn't have the power to heal all at once.
- It was NOT because the man's blindness was a particularly hard case.
- It was NOT because Jesus tried and failed the first time.

We now know what is NOT. So now, what IS? To find out, we go back to the Bible. We look at the text itself. If the text does not give us the answer, we go to the context. To study the context is to find out what comes before and after the passage, and see if that can help us better understand.

This brings us to a third question.

## III. What do we learn from the context?

If you go back to the beginning of Mark 8, you have the miracle of the feeding of the 4,000 (vv. 1-10). Immediately afterwards the Pharisees came to argue with Jesus (vv. 11-12). After Jesus and the disciples got into a boat, He warned them to beware of the yeast of the Pharisees (v. 15). Yeast is 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, "Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember?" (v. 18)

In essence, Jesus was rebuking His disciples this way, "How can you be so blind after having been with me so long? Don't you understand anything I'm saying and teaching?"

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<sup>2</sup> Eisenberg, Ronald L. *The JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions*. PA: Jewish Publication Society, 2004; Kolatch, Alfred J. *The Jewish Book of Why/The Second Jewish Book of Why*. NY: Jonathan David Publishers, 1989.

So what is Jesus trying to teach here in vv. 22-26 in view of the bigger context in Mark 8?

You can't separate this miracle from its context because the miracle is used to mirror the spiritual confusion of the disciples. It is possible to have eyes and yet not see very clearly. And that's precisely what Jesus was saying to His disciples. "Do you have eyes and yet not see what I am saying and teaching?" "Do you have eyes and yet not see clearly who I am?"

Hazy spiritual vision afflicts every Christian to some degree. Eugene Peterson catches the meaning with his paraphrase of 1 Cor 13:12 (MSG): "We don't yet see things clearly. We're squinting in a fog, peering through a mist."

That's what this blind man experienced. When he was partially healed, he saw men as trees walking. No one sees life with all perfect clarity. All of us have spiritual short-sightedness to one degree or another.

If we had asked the blind man himself he would probably be very happy. He had been totally blind before he met Jesus. Hence, if he had received even partial vision, it would have been an end to the darkness in his life.

Of course, the healing didn't stop there. The man wasn't left like this, seeing men like walking trees. Jesus went on and restored his sight to complete vision. But this miracle isn't like the others. So it must have been Jesus' intention to heal this man in two stages. It certainly isn't true that the Lord couldn't get it right the first time and so had to try again. Remember, He could even bring dead bodies back to life. So fixing a pair of eyes should really be "no sweat" for Him.

Note also that Jesus did not insist on cooperation before He healed here. He didn't say, "I need total faith from you before you can get this miracle." There is nothing like that. There is no hint of blame attached to this blind man—that he hadn't enough faith, and so, Jesus was only able to give him half vision.

So, why did the Lord decide to heal him in these two stages? I believe it was because of the accompanying disciples who were watching the working out of this miracle. The Lord wanted to underline something that was happening to them at a spiritual level. He was giving them a picture of themselves. This miracle was a mirror which He was holding up to them. He was saying to them, "Now this is where you are. This is the spiritual state in which you are now in."

This miracle happened at a point in Jesus' ministry where many people who had been blind to God were starting to catch glimpses of something they had never seen before.

- They heard Jesus speak with great authority.
- They watched him drive out demons.

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- They saw him do amazing miracles.
- They sensed that there was something special about Jesus.
- They knew that it had something to do with God.

But they still didn't see clearly that Jesus was God in human flesh or that they could have eternal life through Him. They were starting to see, but they needed to see clearer.

This miracle comes at a halfway point in Mark's account of Jesus' life (Mark has 16 chapters). According to Mark 6, people soon began coming up with theories about who Jesus really was. Many were saying that He was a prophet like the great prophets of long ago.

Even after all of His miracles, no one—not even his closest companions—could clearly see who Jesus was or why He had come. Just before the two-stage healing of the blind man, Jesus had a discussion with His disciples in the boat, and they still didn't get it—"Do you still not understand?" He asked them in Mark 8:21.

It was then that the blind man was brought to Christ. The Lord Jesus intended to heal him, but He also wanted to dramatize the spiritual condition of the people around Him. So Jesus spat on the man's eyes and touched him, and then asked him what he saw. The man said he could see some shapes but they were blurred.

He was honest. He didn't try to pretend he saw clearly. Then Jesus touched him again, and everything came into focus.

Let me now pose our fourth question at this point.

#### **IV. What lessons are there for us today?**

*First lesson: Jesus doesn't treat us all the same.* He has the power to heal instantly or in stages. He is not limited by anything or anyone. He heals one with a touch, another with a word, another with a glance, and yet another at a great distance. He touches one and never sees the other, and yet both are healed.

It takes spiritual maturity to be able to say, "Lord, you don't have to treat me the way you treat someone else."

Many people struggle with this concept because they think that because God did something for a friend or a neighbour or a loved one, then God must be bound to do the same thing for them. But it doesn't work that way.

God can deliver you from cancer but a loved one may die of cancer. Conversely, envying your neighbour because he has something you don't have is a waste of time because God does not treat us all the same. The truth is, He might do for you exactly what He's done for someone else, or He might

do more, or He might do less, or He might do something entirely different. He's God. He can deal with us the way He wants.

Our God is infinitely creative in the way He deals with us as He brings us to spiritual maturity.

*Second lesson: the Lord deals with us at our point of need.* Notice how Christ took the blind man away from the gaze of the crowd, away from the village and dealt with him privately. His healing was for God's glory, not for the entertainment of the masses. Jesus could have got more publicity by doing a public healing and then commanding the healed man to hurry back to the village and tell the whole community what had happened. The Lord dealt with the man (and He deals with us today) personally at our point of need.

Notice how personal the Lord was to the blind man in v. 24—"He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village." We see it clearly in this story. He dealt with this poor blind man privately by taking him outside the village in order to heal him. Even though his friends brought him to Christ, our Lord is not trying to meet the expectations of the crowd. And He dealt with this man by touching him not once but three times.

- 1<sup>st</sup> touch—took his hand (v. 23).
- 2<sup>nd</sup> touch—touched his eyes first time (v. 23).
- 3<sup>rd</sup> touch—put His hands a second time on the man's eyes (v. 25).

That's no small matter for a blind man. We know that the blind compensate for the loss of sight by highly developing their other senses, especially the sense of hearing and the sense of touch. So touch is a very personal and intimate way of relating to the blind. And the Lord touched him three times in our story—He ministered to the blind man in a very personal and intimate way at his point of need.

*Third lesson: we grow at different pace.* This is a good word for all of us who are praying for our loved ones who are away from the Lord. And in our prayers we do the same for our prodigals who are in the far country. We cry out on behalf of those who today walk in spiritual blindness and we ask the Lord to open their eyes and help them to see. It is good that we should do this because it humbles us and causes us to say, "Lord, unless you help them, they will not be helped. Unless you work, nothing will ever change."

But often, the change we seek comes very slowly. For every man who is suddenly, radically, completely transformed, it seems that there many more who must grow in Christ slowly through stages, and whose spiritual vision starts off hazy and only slowly gets better. Spectacular healings always amaze us, yet we must realize that God often chooses to heal by what might be called ordinary means.

This principle works across the spectrum of the spiritual life. Some people come to Christ and grow quickly, becoming strong disciples in a short period

of time. Others take years to learn the Word and become strong in the faith. Many will struggle with hazy vision for a long time.

*Fourth lesson: our spiritual perception here on earth will always be imperfect.* We all have blind spots, areas of weakness, areas of life where we see with hazy vision, parts of life where we still need God to continue working in us. Who among us would say, "I have arrived. I am truly like Jesus in every part of my life."

If spiritual growth is truly growth, then it is not instant development. That's bad news for impatient people. We are like the man who prayed, "Lord, give me patience and give it to me right now!" We want quick answers in five steps, six keys, and seven principles that will lead us to the "victorious Christian life".

*But God rarely works like that.* We are born as little children who must go through all the stages of life, learning and growing. And how does a little child learn to walk? That child learns by trying and falling, trying and falling, and then trying and falling some more.

Much of our trying and falling has to do with the fact that our heart is not always fully engaged in the things of God. For example, a believer may struggle to accept why he has got to do certain things and stop doing others. He thinks that is being narrow and restrictive. He calls Christ as Saviour and yet when it comes to the application of His teachings, there is confusion in the human will.

It is often hard to be honest with God; to admit our weakness to God. What finally saved the blind man was his honesty. He didn't lie to Jesus. He could have said, "Lord, I see all things clearly." If he had said that, he would never have gotten better. His honesty gave him the complete sight he did not have.

Christ asked this man "Can you see anything?" not because He did not know. Jesus already knew the answer to the question. He wanted the man to be honest about his true condition.

In the same way, we must come to the Lord just as we are. When we do, He takes us as we are, but He never leaves us that way. Are we willing to be honest about our own condition? When we admit our need, then we become open to the Lord's work and healing in our lives.

## **Conclusion**

In 2004, I believe by God's own divine appointment, the Lord led me to meet up with a long-lost classmate in primary school one Sunday after church service.

My family and I had lunch at a nearby coffee shop. Unknown to me, a man seated at the next table was looking at me with great interest. When I was about to leave with my family after our lunch, this man

stood up and moved toward me. He called me by my Chinese name. I looked at him and suddenly my memories informed me who he was.

When I was in Primary 6, I had two very good friends. Unfortunately, one failed his Primary School Leaving Exam (PSLE) and had to stay back for another year. The other and I went to different secondary schools. As telephone was not a common home item at that time, we lost contact over the years.

The man I met that Sunday afternoon was the one who had to repeat his PSLE. It was the first time we met again after more than 40 years. He introduced the woman with him as his wife. We then sat down and chatted.

There were many things I learnt about him after so many years.

- He had become a very successful entrepreneur. He had business interests in the oil, engineering, and food industries both in Singapore and around the region. In fact, he was already semi-retired, just letting his siblings and others to run things for him.
- His wife was a Christian. He was not a believer though he had no serious problem with Christianity or any religion. In fact, he would drive his wife to church every Sunday though he would not go in.

In the course of our conversation, he found out that I was in fulltime Christian ministry. He expressed an interest to talk more with me about the things of God. He thought all religions should be the same. I pointed out to him that Christianity was not so much committing to a religion, but to a relationship with Jesus Christ. Sensing his openness, I tried to invite him and his wife to church. However, I sensed that he was very reluctant to be in church with his wife though they were very happy to meet me outside church.

We met together again for breakfast one morning. I could sense that they wanted to say something important to me. Slowly and carefully, the man opened himself up and said, "John, there are some things that we think you need to know." I nodded my head in full anticipation.

Looking at the woman, he continued, "She is not my wife and I am not her husband. We are just cohabitating. She is a divorcee. I am a divorcee too, but twice over. In the early years of my first marriage, I went all out to make all the money I could. Almost 20 years later, I brought my money to my first wife. She looked at me and said, 'There's a man giving me all the love I need during the years when you were giving your life to make all this money. You can keep all your money because I want to get out with the children and be with this man.'"

Trying to control his emotions, he paused briefly and then added, “I was devastated. In my desperate loneliness, I remarried hastily. But not long into this second marriage, I discovered that my second wife was trying to cheat me of all my money. When I initiated the divorce, she gave me hell from beginning to end. I have become very afraid of committing myself to another relationship. In fact, it seems safer to just cohabit than to commit to a formalized marriage. So when you mention that the Christian faith is not about committing to a religion but to a relationship, I really struggle to accept that. I am really afraid of committing to any relationship again.”

This was when the woman took over and said, “This is why we want to see you. We want to let you know that while we appreciate you inviting us to church, we are so reluctant to be in church together. We don’t feel right to do so because we are living together in a way not acceptable in the sight of the church.”

So here’s an unbelieving man who has become so successful materially yet feeling like a great failure deep inside him. By his own admission, he sees his need for God but fears so much about committing himself to a relationship with Him. He sees his need for God yet he sees with hazy vision.

And here’s a believing woman who knows that she is in an illicit relationship, but cannot bring herself to stop it. She sees the need to please God yet she sees with hazy vision.

There are many people out there who see only with hazy vision. We need the Lord to help us reach out to them. By His grace, we need to be patient and loving enough to extend to them another touch from the Lord so that they may see more clearly and walk out of the darkness of sin.

Having understood what text meant to the Lord’s people then and what it means to us today, what then are we to do about it? Some application considerations are:

- *Don’t rush new believers through too quickly.* Sometimes we expect too much from new believers. The grace of God may be upon them and they may have been touched by the Lord, but they may still not see everything all too clearly in the early phase.
- *Don’t give up when you are not quickly transformed.* Do not despair about your own spiritual progress. Allow the Lord to work in your life. It may seem slow, but the Lord often starts small so that He can dig deep into you, and move you on to bigger things when you are well grounded.



- *Be honest before God with your incompleteness.* It takes spiritual maturity to say to the Lord with honesty, “Lord, help my blindness and let me see” or “Lord, my sight is hazy. Help me see clearer.”
- *Trust that God will use your honesty to bring out something good and not to penalize you.* It is often His intent to use your imperfect vision/imperfection to bring you to a place of deeper trust in Him. Nothing is wasted with the Lord, not even those times when you can’t see clearly.

Are you having difficulty seeing your way ahead? The Lord came that we might see life clearly from His point of view. If your nights are dark, your life is foggy, and the weather is cloudy, come to Jesus today for He can help you see life and things more clearly. Do you believe that? Would you come to Jesus today?