

# The Progression of Spiritual Sight

Mark 8:1-30

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It's hard to imagine a world where we have no sight. Each of us are so dependent upon our eye sight, that it's difficult to imagine what it would be like to never have it, to wander in the darkness, and to understand the world only through touch and sound. The details of shapes, the radiance of light, and the saturation of color would not exist. You would not have the capacity to grasp such concepts. As a blind person, someone could describe to you what the color red looks like or describe to you what it's like to see the rays of the sun, but such knowledge comes only from personal experience, an experience a blind person cannot have.

Though most of us are not physically blind, all of us are born spiritually blind. We live in God's world of color and light and beauty, yet we do not have the capacity to gaze upon the beauty of Christ. Our sinful and hardened hearts cannot imagine the spiritual world that surrounds us. And even though we can speak and share the Gospel in all sincerity and clarity, even still many will doubt the existence of God of the love of Christ, because they do not possess the new sense to perceive them. They are spiritually blind. To put our faith in Christ, and confess him as Lord, God must give us spiritual sight. He must open our eyes to the realities all around us, but realities we do not have a capacity to understand.

As we turn our attention towards Mark 8:1-30, we are going to look at a series of events in Jesus' life and how they weave together to teach us this important truth: the Lord progressively opens the eyes of the spiritually blind. Though we are all born spiritually blind, God's work of grace is often through a gradual awakening of the soul to the identity and glory of Christ! Even after we see Christ as savior and Lord, our spiritual vision continues to expand as the Spirit further captivates us with the beauty of Christ. Spiritual vision occurs gradually and progressively, as we will see in the case of Jesus' disciples. As we move

through our text today we will see that progression of spiritual vision: first, blindness; second, haziness; thirdly, clarity.

## Blindness: Eyes Shut (Mk 8:1-21)

We begin with the event of the feeding of the four thousand. Jesus had already performed the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand earlier in the Gospel, but here are a few unique observations about this particular miracle. First, Jesus is in gentile territory rather than in the boundaries of Israel. In the feeding of the five thousand, we saw Jesus as the tender hearted shepherd who feeds and satisfies the lost and wandering flock of Israel. Here in the feeding of the four thousand, we see that Jesus provides satisfaction for the gentiles as well. Here is another glimpse, as we saw last week with the Syrophonecian woman, that Jesus is also the savior of the gentiles as well! However, a second observation here (and more important for our consideration today) is that the disciples still don't realize who Jesus is! Even after they had seen Jesus miraculously feed the crowd of five thousand, when Jesus expresses his desire to feed the crowd of four thousand, they express disbelief. The disciples say in verse four "How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?" Yet, Jesus performs a similar miracle. He took the seven loaves of bread available, gave thanks, and broke the bread for distribution. There were also a few small fish. The food is distributed and "they ate and were satisfied" (v. 8). After Jesus had performed this miracle, creating food from nothing, they took seven baskets full leftover.

But note the disciple's spiritual blindness. They have witnessed Jesus do amazing miracles, they have even seen him feed a crowd of five thousand! Yet, here the disciples still do not see. They do not understand. Even after all they've seen, they still doubt Jesus' ability to feed and do not understand his identity as the son of God. However, though we could give the disciples a hard time for their blindness, there is a group that's even more hard hearted against Jesus, and that would be the Pharisees! We will return to the disciple's blindness in just a bit, but Mark 8 is a transition into the second act of his Gospel. A turning point occurs at Peter's confession in this chapter. However, before he transitions the next section, where the cross begins to loom over Jesus as he makes his way to Jerusalem, Mark takes the opportunity to reflect on the spiritual blindness of both groups, the Pharisees and the disciples.

In verse 10, we see that Jesus and his disciples encounter the Pharisees again, with the sole purpose of arguing with Jesus. They look for a debate, and want to test Jesus by asking for a “sign from heaven.” However, Mark makes it clear that their motivation for asking Jesus for a sign is not because they are interested in believing in Jesus, rather they are looking to “test” him. They hope to discredit Jesus before the eyes of the people, and so repudiate his ministry. Jesus, perceiving their hardness of heart, does not give them a sign. Jesus responds in a deep and sorrowful sigh at the hardness of heart of this present generation. Jesus said, “Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation.” Jesus had already performed many signs, which proved his identity as the son of God, yet the Pharisees aren’t convinced by them.

Jesus had given them signs. He’s healed the sick and he’s casted out demons. However, because of their hardness of heart, the Pharisees could not see the signs. Their sin blinded them from seeing the truth about Jesus! So, here they come to Jesus now, not really interested in believing in Jesus, but simply wishing to prove him a fraud.

At such unbelief and hardness of heart, Jesus groans in grief. Jesus still does so today over those whose hearts remain hard against the truth of the Gospel and those who spew skepticism against Jesus and his ministry. Though the Pharisees had great skill and knowledge, and promoted formal religion, they were spiritually blind. May that be a lesson to us all this morning; you can be incredibly religious and yet incredibly blind.

Next Mark shows us the blindness of the disciples. Even though they admire Jesus, and have chosen to follow him, they still do not understand who he is. Even though they’ve had inner access to Jesus’ life and teaching, they continue to be spiritually blind.

So, Jesus and the disciples are on the boat, and they had forgotten to bring bread so there is just one loaf left. Jesus takes this opportunity to try to teach the disciples, particularly after coming off of this confrontation with the Pharisees. So, he tells them, “Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.” The disciples, thinking Jesus is speaking of actual bread, begin to discuss the fact that they don’t have any! Have you ever had that experience before? You’re trying to teach someone or explain something to a child, and it literally just flies way above their head. They are so out in left field, that they don’t even know what’s going on. That was Jesus and the disciples, so

Jesus reigns the conversation in, "Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear?" Jesus makes the point, that the disciples still do not get it. They still lack understanding. In many ways, they are a lot like the Pharisees. They are spiritually blind.

Then Jesus begins to rebuke them for their failure to grasp the meaning of the miracle of the loaves. He goes on and says, "And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?" They respond correctly: twelve. Then Jesus asked them about the number of baskets at the feeding of the four thousand. They respond correctly: seven. Yet, Jesus asks them, "Do you not yet understand?" This is the way spiritual blindness works; you can have all the facts, and yet still not have understanding. The disciples had witnessed Jesus reproduce bread out of nothing—twice! There is no excuse for them not to understand the significance of that miracle. Like all the signs, they point to Jesus' true identity: he is the creator God who makes bread out of nothing. He is the powerful God who creates molecules of bread out of thin air. This miracle attests to the divinity of Jesus! Even though the disciples witnessed the events, both times, they still do not grasp Jesus' true identity. They are spiritually blind.

How gracious it is that God is so patient with us! We are so often slow learners, yet he shows kindness to us as we gradually grow in our understanding of the truth. Just as the Lord is patient with us in our blindness, so too must we be patient with others, particularly new converts to the faith. New Christians are still learning the foundation of the Gospel. They are just beginning to grasp Jesus' identity. As we come along and teach these younger believers, we should not grow exasperated with their lack of understanding. Instead, we should patiently and faithfully come alongside them, and help them grow in the truth, understanding that such growth takes many months and years. Just as a seed doesn't grow into an oak in one night, neither does a new believer grow into Christian maturity. As we will see, such spiritual sight slowly begins to occur. It is gradual, slow but progressing!

The Pharisees in their spiritual blindness possess no understanding, and little hope of ever receiving spiritual sight due to their hardness of heart and skepticism about Jesus. However, the disciples, though they too are spiritually blind, will begin to gain understanding gradually. To help us understand the

progression of spiritual sight, Mark tells us of an important miracle of Jesus, that indicates this progression of spiritual sight.

So when it comes to this spiritual progression, we first begin in blindness, but secondly our eyes become hazy.

## Haziness: Eyes Blurry (Mk 8:22-26)

Now, if you just randomly opened up your Bible and you started reading at Mark 8:22, you would very well be confused with what's going on here. This healing is a great illustration of why it is so important to understand the context of any passage of Scripture. Because, if you just randomly read this passage without understanding what happens before it or after it, it seems a bit strange.

Jesus comes to Bethsaida, and a blind man is brought to him. Jesus takes the man out of the village, spit on his eyes, and laid his hands on him. Jesus then asked him, "Do you see anything?" The man responds, "I see people, but they look like trees walking." Then Jesus laid his hands on him a second time, and then his sight was fully restored! So, what's going on here? Did Jesus make a mistake the first time? Was he not prayed up that morning before he started the day? Did he not use enough spit on the guy's eyes? However, since we know the context of this miracle, we know exactly what Jesus is doing here. He is using this blind man of Bethsaida as a lesson to instruct his disciples about spiritual sight.

When the Spirit of God begins to open up our eyes to the truth, rarely do we gain immediate clarity. The truths of God begin by looking hazy. We can see, but the world around us seems blurry and out of focus.

When we talk about people coming to saving faith in Christ, we tend to emphasize a dramatic, instantaneous event. Our tradition tends to emphasize a special event where we walked the aisle in some special revival service or something. Now, while I do believe the new birth and conversion is an instantaneous event, we often over emphasize trying to pin point a specific moment in time when our eyes were opened to the truth. Though there is a time when the opening of our eyes come, often there is a period of haziness as we begin to understand Jesus' true identity. This period of haziness is different for each person. Some people have a dramatic conversion, and the period of

spiritual haziness is quite short. They go immediately from blindness to clarity! However, for others that period of haziness can be several weeks, months, or even years! The Lord slowly begins to open their eyes to the truth, until one day they see clearly!

This idea of spiritual haziness has two big applications. **First**, don't fret if its difficult for you to ascertain when your conversion took place. For example, many who came to faith as children have difficulty remembering the point where God open their eyes. As one who came to faith as a child around the age of eight or nine, I can't remember a day where I had a dramatic experience and my eyes were open. In fact, in many ways, my eyes saw Jesus clearly, as I put my faith and trust in him, but as a child my understanding of God's truth was still hazy after I became a Christian. It wasn't until my middle school and high school years, that the Lord increased my clarity of the Gospel and its full implications on my life. So if you have difficulty pinpointing the specific time where you first had faith, don't fret about it. There may have been a period of time in your life where your spiritual blindness became a foggy haze, and that foggy haze dissipated into the clear sight of faith. God often slowly gives us understanding, and at some point the eyes of faith are fully open, though its sometimes difficult for us to discern when that occurred.

However a **second** application here deals with our evangelistic efforts. In our evangelism, we have a tendency to give up on people who don't respond immediately or instantaneously to the Gospel message. We have to understand that though God can work immediately and instantaneously, that experience is not normative for everyone. Not everyone has a road to Damascus experience like Saul of Tarsus. Yet, even Saul had a period of time in which he gained full spiritual sight! So, share the Gospel with people, but don't write people off if they don't make a profession of faith right then and there. Continue your conversation with them at a later time. Talk with them about the Gospel. Invite them over for dinner to talk more about Christianity and the Gospel. Answer their questions. Invite them to church with you. Ask to start a Bible study together. Do this, knowing that the Lord often slowly opens peoples eyes to the truth. we should be patient and persistent in our evangelism, trusting the Spirit of God to work over time.

So the progression of spiritual sight begin in spiritual blindness and moves to a spiritual haziness. However, thirdly, clarity comes and our eyes are open.

# Clarity: Eyes Open (Mk 8:27-30)

This healing of the Blind man at Bethsaida transitions to one of the defining moments in the Gospel, and the beginning of act 2 of this book, the confession of Peter. Here the mood of the book begins to shift, revealed by the change in geography. Here, in Caesarea Philippi, Jesus is north about 100 miles from Jerusalem. At Peter's confession, Jesus begins the descent into the suffering of his Messianic mission in Jerusalem.

Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" They mentioned some of the common answers that the people were giving. Some thought he was John the Baptist back from the dead, others thought he was Elijah, still others thought he was one of the prophets. But, Jesus gets more specific. "Who do you say that I am?" Peter answers, "You are the Christ."

Here we see Peter, representing the disciples, has his eyes open to Jesus true identity. He realizes that Jesus is the Christ, the promised and long awaited Messiah. Now Peter still has a great deal more to understand, and though he's clear on Jesus' identity as the Messiah, he is not clear on Jesus' ultimate mission. As we will discover next week, Peter is appalled that the Messiah would ever be crucified! However, Peter here confesses that Jesus is the Christ! Blessed be those who share in Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ! Those who confess Jesus as the Christ receive him as savior and Lord, and are given forgiveness of sin and life everlasting. Through our confession of faith, the great work of Christ's redemption upon the cross and the sure victory of his resurrection is given to us!

But, How did Peter come to this realization? Well in the parallel passage of this event in Matthew, we hear Jesus' response to Peter's confession, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 16:17, ESV).

So, who is it that opens the eyes of the spiritually blind? It is God himself! The Father in heaven reveals to us the truth of Jesus' identity. He gives us understanding. The Spirit of God comes into our lives, and through the testimony of the Word of God removes the scales over our eyes so that we can perceive the truth about Jesus. As the blinders come off, we can see Jesus as the beautiful and radiant Messiah he is!



By the power of God, our blindness morphs into a haziness, and haziness morphs into clarity. By the supernatural power of God, our eyes are opened to the truth! This is called the new birth or regeneration. By the Spirit's power, you've been given a new sense, a new ability to understand the truth. The hindrance of your own sin and depravity is lifted, and now you can truly see. A world of color and light and radiance is now open up to you. It's a world that has always existed, but until God gave you the ability to see it, you could not believe. But now, born again of the Spirit of God, and given this spiritual sight, you see Jesus. You see his glory, majesty, and power—and the world begins to finally, for the first time, make sense. As you gaze upon the beauty of Christ, you see clearly, so you confess rightly, "Jesus, you are the Christ!"

## Final Thoughts

As Christians, we must give thanks to God for giving us sight. We have understood and believed upon the Gospel, not because we are smarter than anyone else, or more cunning than others. Rather, we see because God has opened our eyes. He has lifted us out of the darkness of our blindness to see the light of his Son! He has given us the eyes of faith, and now we see truly and rightly. We can see Christ's glory, his power, and his majesty as the Son of God! If you have spiritual sight this morning, give thanks to God for his great work of grace in your life! It is not by your own power or might that you see, but by the power of God alone.

If this morning you're not a Christian, I pray that you are beginning to sense your own spiritual blindness. I pray that even through this sermon, that your vision goes from blindness to haziness. That as you've heard the good news of Jesus as the Christ this morning, that you would begin to understand and that by the Spirit's power you would understand further. If you feel as if your spiritual vision is hazy this morning, pray that God would give you eyes to see the beauty of Christ. Pray that he would impress the sense of Christ's excellency into your own soul, and that he might give you the clear vision of Christ! Like a blind man seeing color for the first time, may your eyes be opened to the beauty of Christ! When Christ shows you himself, respond to him with repentance and faith, trusting in him as your Messiah. May God give us all eyes to see and behold the glory of Christ, the Messiah who opens the eyes of the blind!