

## Men as Trees Walking

### Mark 8:22-25

*Then He came to Bethsaida; and they brought a blind man to Him, and begged Him to touch him. <sup>23</sup> So He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the town. And when He had spit on his eyes and put His hands on him, He asked him if he saw anything. <sup>24</sup> And he looked up and said, "I see men like trees, walking." <sup>25</sup> Then He put His hands on his eyes again and made him look up. And he was restored and saw everyone clearly.*

The remarkable thing about this miracle is that this is the only miracle where Jesus healed someone in stages. In every other occurrence, Jesus healed people totally, instantaneously. In fact, in other cases of healing blindness, Jesus simply said, 'Receive thy sight' – and they were healed. So the Lord must have had a reason for healing in stages. I believe much of it was a lesson for the onlooking disciples. The miracles were certainly acts of grace and kindness to the ones receiving them, but they were also parables acted out – spiritual lessons that could be learned. Sometimes the physical healing was an illustration of a spiritual problem that needed healing. And this, I believe, is what Jesus was doing here.

What points to this is the context. What has just happened before this miracle occurs? Jesus has fed the 4000, is challenged by the Pharisees to do a miracle, and in the boat Jesus says to his disciples, 'Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees.' The disciples say, 'It must be because we forgot to take bread', and how does Jesus respond to that?

**Mar 8:17-21** *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? **Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not?** and do ye not remember? When I brake the five loaves among five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? They say unto him, Twelve. And when the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? And they said, Seven. And he said unto them, How is it that ye do not understand?*

Take note of that phrase – *having eyes, see ye not?* Jesus said it other ways:

**Mat 13:14** *And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: 'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, And seeing you will see and not perceive;*

And what is happening here is that the Lord is going to use this man as an object lesson for the disciples, and in turn for all believers who read this passage and understand it. And through it, bring change.

*Our Condition before Salvation.*

A person who is blind can know about certain objects and people. They may be able to hear people speak, or hear a car's engine, or a dog bark. They may smell they are near a bakery, or know a lady with strong perfume is in the lift with them. They may know and feel that they are outdoors in the sunshine; they may feel the fur of a dog sniffing them. A blind person can have knowledge, but they cannot see what is before them, around them. If what is around them does not make a sound or have a smell, and if they do not touch it with their hands or a stick – they cannot know it is there.

A spiritually blind person is like that toward God. He knows there is a God. He has looked up at the sky in the day or at night, he has looked down from high hills or mountains, he has stared at the ocean and heard the voice of a Creator. Like a deaf person hears shuffling feet and knows someone is here – the spiritually blind person looks at creation and says – ‘Someone is there’ **(Romans 1)**.

A spiritually blind person looks inside himself. He finds that he wants to live longer than men seem to live. He does not want to die. He seems to have eternity in his heart. He asks questions like, ‘Why am I here? What is life about? Where am I going? What will happen to me when I die?’ And these questions and feelings do not seem like those of an evolved animal – they seem spiritual – and like a deaf person hears music and knows there must be instruments nearby, the spiritually blind person hears his conscience and these ultimate questions and knows, ‘God must be there’ **(Romans 1)**.

And yet, the spiritually blind person cannot see God for whom He is; He cannot really understand who God is. God is there, but He is ‘out there.’ He is a mystery, an idea, a faraway truth which never impacts life – like faraway galaxies or black holes.

The Bible makes no sense. Jesus dying on the cross for our sins seems odd. In fact, the whole idea of the Bible being the Word of God seems absurd. The miracles of the Bible seem impossible. The concepts of heaven and hell seem like silly fairy tales.

In other words – the truth, as God states it, seems unreal. He hears about God, suspects God is there, but cannot see, in the sense of recognising the truth of things. It all seems, in a word, unbelievable. He looks at Christians and feels, ‘These people are a bit insane.’ You see, he doesn’t think he is blind, he thinks we are seeing things that aren’t there.

The Bible sometimes calls it – walking in darkness. Because walking in darkness is the same as being blind. You do not know what is really there.

As Jim Berg points out, being blind is dangerous and discouraging. It’s dangerous because you can’t see what is really there – you might step on a skateboard lying on front of you. You might walk into an open manhole. You might walk onto a slippery path. It’s discouraging because you don’t always understand what is going on around you. You need to expend more effort to make sense of things and get by.

A person walking in spiritual darkness, a person spiritually blind, faces danger and discouragement. Danger, because you don’t see what is really there – evil forces trying to tempt you to destroy yourself, hidden traps of the world designed to lure you in and get you into bondage. You don’t see the wrath of God looming over you, only mercy sparing your life.

And it’s discouraging, because you try to get by without God in a world made by God and for God. Things don’t always make sense. In fact things get downright frustrating, meaningless and pointless. You come to the conclusions of Ecclesiastes – *vanity, vanity all is vanity*.

You might say, ‘How does a person become spiritually blind?’

*Natural Blindness – Caused By Sin and Satan*

**Eph 4:18** *having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart;*

We are born with a sinful nature which we inherit from our first parent – Adam. And this condition is the condition of spiritual blindness. Consider yourself. Did you naturally, without anyone telling you, understand that God is the Three-in-One Creator of this world, who is holy and loving? Did you know instinctively that you needed a Saviour and that Christ died and rose again so that you might have life in Him?

No – you didn't know that, because you are blind before salvation. Spiritual realities are not apparent.

And to make matters worse – Satan adds to the blindness.

**2 Cor 4:4** *whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.*

But there is a second way spiritual blindness comes.

*Judicial Blindness – Caused By God*

It may sound contradictory at first – but the Bible teaches us that God blinds people's minds when they keep rejecting the light that God sends.

**Rom 11:8** *Just as it is written: "God has given them a spirit of stupor, Eyes that they should not see And ears that they should not hear, To this very day."*

**John 9:39** *And Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind."*

Why would God do this? Because when man rejects the light God repeatedly gives him, God may judge him by making him less capable of receiving light. Pharaoh first hardened his own heart to God's Word, and having done that, God judged Pharaoh by allowing his heart to harden further.

It is a very serious thing to hear what God says. Because what you do with it may affect how much you understand or see the next time God speaks.

Here is the warning we must all receive: you can be very religious and be blind. Do you know what Jesus called the 'pastors' of His day? Blind guides! Blind leaders of the blind! Six times Jesus called the Pharisees blind.

Jesus called a whole church blind. The church at Laodicea was doing very well financially – they had much in the way of goods – but Jesus says, 'You are blind.' You can be in church, be baptised, take communion, say all the right things, pray every day, read your Bible, try to be generally moral and upright, give money to the Lord, and say certain things and even mean them – 'Jesus is the Son of God.' But you can still be blind, if the reality of God's truth has never

come into sharp focus for you. If it is still confusing, and nonsensical, and strange, but you still partake in it, you may well be spiritually blind.

Salvation is when God forgives you of your sins, gives you new life and opens your eyes.

But no one who is blind will find their way to the Saviour. In the case of this man, how did he arrive in front of Jesus? ‘They brought a man to Jesus.’

A person does not at first come; they are brought. Who brings them? The Holy Spirit of God brings a person. He draws you through others speaking to you. He draws you through your own conscience accusing you. Above all, He draws you through the Word of God that is preached.

And He draws you as an individual. He seeks you as an individual. And Jesus deals with you as an individual, as He did with this man. Look at what He does. Again, he takes him aside, out of the town – away from the commotion.

And then Jesus does something strange – He spits on his eyes. Now we may speculate here. The Jews sometimes used saliva as a ‘remedy’ for eye problems – so perhaps he was appealing to this man’s understanding from his own culture, to say, ‘I am about to work on your eyes.’ Jesus did a similar thing with the blind man in **John 9**. Perhaps the eyes were closed with a secretion, and the saliva was figurative to say, ‘I will not only open your eyelids, but your very eyes.’

But perhaps again, there is symbolism here. Where does saliva come from? It comes from the mouth. What else can come out of your mouth? Words come out of your mouth. Perhaps Jesus is giving a symbol here – ‘*Faith comes by hearing and hearing of the Word.*’ Your spiritual eyes will only open under the sound of the Gospel – the truth of God’s Word.

And on top of that – someone’s saliva is not usually received well. It is seen as disgusting to spit on someone. And when the Word of God comes and preaches the truth of our sin, or our fallen condition, of the need for the cross, of the need for repentance – it might seem like an offence, the offence of the cross. But we must receive it if we are to see

Here is the difference between this man’s blindness and spiritual blindness. This man’s blindness was a physical defect. Spiritual blindness is a refusal to see. It is a refusal to see our sin for what it is. It is a refusal to see God dying on the cross in our place. It is a refusal to look at Him and recognise our sin and our need, and cry out to Him for salvation.

**John 3:19-21** *And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. <sup>20</sup>For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. <sup>21</sup>But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”*

What must you do?

Believe! Stop closing your eyes to the truth. Look and live:

**John 3:14-16** *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup>that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. <sup>16</sup>For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

God says to the Blind person in **Isaiah 42:18** *Hear, you deaf; And look, you blind, that you may see.* It sounds like a contradiction to say to a blind person - 'See'. But didn't Jesus say to lame men - 'Rise up and walk?' Didn't he say to dead people - 'Arise?' And God says to you - 'If you want to see spiritually - then look and live. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour and He will forgive you and give you new life. The moment you turn to look, God will turn on the light.'

**John 6:40** *"And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."*

Once you are saved, things you did not understand make perfect sense. You remember that believer - before that day, it was all a haze, a mess, a confusion of unrelated facts. That day you were born again, did not things begin to make sense in a new way? Did it not now seem so unbelievably simple? Did you not go to your friends and relatives and expect they would see it as well, since it was now so obvious to you. Salvation is the restoration of spiritual sight.

And that is what happens here - Jesus physically restores this man's sight. He asks the man, 'What do you see?' The man has had some sight restored. Now Jesus asks him, 'What do you see?'

And that leads us to the application for believers.

#### *Our Possible Condition after Salvation*

The man tells Jesus, 'I see men, as trees, walking'. 'I see men - they are as indistinct as trees, but I see them walking.' He can see, but his vision remains blurry, unclear.

I told you Jesus was giving this miracle as a parable to the disciples. They were believers. They had been granted spiritual sight.

**Mat 13:16** *But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear.*

But in a way, they still did not see - because He had just said to them, 'Having eyes - do you not see?'

And here is the perfect symbol of them. The man has experienced the greatest miracle - he can now see, but he cannot see clearly. He is no longer blind - but he also cannot see clearly enough to function. And this is how the disciples were at this time, and it is how many, many Christians are.

They can see spiritually - they know the truth, but they cannot see it clearly. You know Jesus is the Saviour, but everything is still very blurry. You do not know the difference between justification and sanctification. You would not be able to tell anyone the basic parts of the Christian life. You could not explain why Jesus had to die in the place of the sinner. You are not sure about how prayer works, or how you are to pray. Baptism is a strange sort of thing for other people. The Lord's Supper is an odd ritual the church does regularly. As to the songs and hymns - they seem to be like listening to a Shakespearean play set to music - nice English, but meaningless. The love of God seems to be like a warm, sentimental notion, but not something which empowers, comforts or strengthens you in a real way. In fact, God's Word seldom intersects with your life, except on Sunday. Perhaps the simplest way of diagnosing spiritual

blurriness is to ask, ‘What comes into your mind when you think of God?’ Is it anything clear? Is it a decent mental portrait of the Creator - Father, Son and Spirit, who has always been, lives self-existently, fills the universe, is far, far above us, and yet dwells within us, completely, Sovereign and all-powerful, unlimited in knowledge and perfect in wisdom, pure, but also boundless in love, in mercy, tenderness, gentleness, grace. Do you mentally see – not visualise – mentally see Jesus Christ – our Man in Glory. Or what do you think of God?

The Christian without illumination is like this man – seeing men as trees walking. You know spiritual truth, but it is so out of focus, so incoherent, as to actually frustrate you instead of help you. This man could now see shapes, but he could not function like that. The Christian without illumination cannot function as a joyful, peaceful, satisfied, victorious Christian. You cannot live the Christian life with vague, blurry concepts of God and the Christian life.

So what must you do?

Firstly, admit that you don’t see as you should. Think of how this man, for appearance sake, could have exaggerated and said, ‘I see! I see!’ But he answered honestly. ‘I do see, but I do not see clearly.’ It starts by saying, ‘To be honest, my Christian life is blurry. I do see, but I may as well be blind, because what I see doesn’t help me understand my life, my God, my future.’

Secondly, submit yourself to further treatment by Christ.

There are some who see. And the breaking in of light seems to be enough for them. They are not bothered by how little they recognise of what they see, how little they understand of what they see. They are apparently satisfied with a Christian life of blurry objects and vague ideas – a life of believing things in an indistinct, fuzzy, unclear, hazy and useless way.

But that is not for you! You as a believer must say, ‘Lord, I see men as trees walking, touch my eyes yet again – that I may see clearly. Lord, I do not see you as I ought to – illuminate me! Speak to me in the Word as I meditate on Scripture, open up the Bible to me that things come into focus.’

Now, here is the thing about illumination. God does not describe it as a special light, or a special truth. It is God removing the scales, the cataracts, the closed eyelids, to see what has been staring us in the face all along.

So I want to say to you – there are two things which prevent you from being illuminated by God.

The first is unbelief, and the second is self-centredness.

Unbelief and self is like having eye trouble combined with a neck spasm that keeps you facing downward. You cannot see much like that. The believer who does not take God at His Word, and who is still absorbed with self, will not see what is staring him in the face.

If in place of unbelief there is faith, and in place of self-centredness there is humility, love and obedience, we will be applying ourselves to Christ’s grace and we will see as we ought.

Five questions:

- 1) Do you believe that God truly exists, that He rewards those who seek Him with Himself, and that God can commune with you in His Word? Or do you doubt that the Bible can really be the place God Himself speaks to your heart? Do you doubt that the Spirit's work of illumination is for you?
- 2) Do you believe that God accepts you in Christ; that He receives you warmly in Jesus, loves you and is pleased with your fellowship? Or are you still hiding, still trying to work in your own strength to please Him, still coming guiltily?
- 3) Are you willing to deny yourself in seeking God? To reckon yourself to be dead to sin and self, and alive only to God, confess sin, repent of it, come to God surrendering your rights to Him, presenting yourself wholly to Him. Are you willing to be humbled before God, stripped of self and open before Him?

Self seeks an experience, but without dethroning itself. Self wants the experience of illumination, but not with any discomfort or jar to the soul. It might want joyful emotions, but not accountability. It does not want to be slain, revealed, or changed. It does not want to be stretched, inconvenienced, troubled or discomforted.

Another thing about denying yourself in seeking God means you seek God for Himself – you do not seek mainly an emotion or an experience as an end in itself – you do not try to use God to get peace or joy or good feelings. You seek a Person – you seek His Presence. You seek God for Himself, and those things will be added unto you.

- 4) Are you willing to wait on God– to seek God until you find Him, to seek understanding, not just knowledge? Are you willing to be dependent – and be patient, seeking until you do not forget, until you begin changing? To beg Him for an open heart, a united heart, an inclined heart, an enlarged heart? Self wants its own way, on its own time. God confronts self by calling upon us to wait on Him, to persevere?
- 5) Are you willing to submit to everything God shows you? God knows the heart. If you knew that the person you were about to explain something to had no intention of carrying out your instructions – would you waste your breath? Our unsubmissive hearts keep our eyes firmly fixed on pleasing ourselves - and we cannot see what is clearly in the Word. Self does not want to please and love God more than itself – so it cannot receive more of God. It is like facing your sail away from the wind – you are not going to go in its direction. Face your will away from God's and you are not going to hear His will and obey it.

The Bible says this man was restored – and saw every man clearly. The Word in the original literally means – *shining*. Things were shining – bright, piercingly clear. That is the sort of spiritual understanding you should seek. Do not be satisfied to either not see, or to see fuzzily. Seek the Lord, and see Him as He wants you to.