

"11 The Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, to test Him. 12 Sighing deeply in His spirit, He *said, "Why does this generation seek for a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation." 13 Leaving them, He again embarked and went away to the other side. 14 And they had forgotten to take bread, and did not have more than one loaf in the boat with them. 15 And He was giving orders to them, saying, "Watch out! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." 16 They began to discuss with one another the fact that they had no bread. 17 And Jesus, aware of this, *said to them, "Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? 18 "HAVING EYES, DO YOU NOT SEE? AND HAVING EARS, DO YOU NOT HEAR? And do you not remember, 19 when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces you picked up?" They *said to Him, "Twelve." 20 "When I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?" And they *said to Him, "Seven." 21 And He was saying to them, "Do you not yet understand?" 22 And they *came to Bethsaida. And they *brought a blind man to Jesus and *implored Him to touch him. 23 Taking the blind man by the hand, He brought him out of the village; and after spitting on his eyes and laying His hands on him, He asked him, "Do you see anything?" 24 And he looked up and said, "I see men, for I see them like trees, walking around." 25 Then again He laid His hands on his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored, and began to see everything clearly. 26 And He sent him to his home, saying, "Do not even enter the village." Mark 8:11-26, NAS95.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the incomparable 19th century London preacher was fascinated with this particular incident in the life of our Lord. He preached on it on July 22, 1866, and ten years later on June 18, 1876, and then once again on September 21 1879. Three different sermons, and all three are on the web and also in print this very day, giving readers all over the world bracing and encouraging insights into the Lord Jesus and how he deals with people. The other mighty London preacher of the 20th century, Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones, was also gripped by this incident, and in his series of sermons on "Spiritual Depression," he preached a famous message on this very text. That is also in print, though not on the web yet. If I have gone for months without reading something written by either of those men then I believe that I am a colder and more ignorant minister.

From our own studies of the Lord Jesus Christ we have learned that Jesus helps people in different ways. As Spurgeon points out, "Had our Lord cast all his miracles in one

mold men would have attached undue importance to the manner by which he worked, and would have superstitiously thought more of it than of the divine power by which the miracles was accomplished." Of course, there is always the same goodness, and the same wisdom, and the same power evident in every wonder of Jesus, but each one was distinct from the others. He was not bound to any one method. He could heal with a touch, but he could also heal with a word. He could also heal without a word, by his mere will. A glance was as efficacious as a touch. His invisible presence was as powerful as his being there in the sick room. The Savior was not so short of methods that he had to repeat some.

This miracle had some unique features about it, especially this, that instead of there being an instant cure here was a case of progressive recovery. Maybe the very blindness of the man lent itself to such an approach. You realize that other conditions needed to be dealt with decisively. Unless a demon were completely cast out of a young girl and the entrance locked and barred against its return little had been accomplished. Unless food were produced there and then 4,000 people would grow faint with hunger. A couple of sandwiches will not help them at all. If a leper were left with patches of disease on his body he would be judged a leper still. But the cure of a man who was totally blind lends itself to a gradual cure, doesn't it? To go from midnight blackness to the full light of day in a moment would be very painful. A progressive flooding of light along the optic nerves to the brain would seem more suitable. So there is something quite natural about a gradual cure, and yet this was absent in the healings of other men blind.

Mark seems to have told this story to underline the total failure of the Twelve to understand, and perhaps to give the reason: they were still too much influenced by the thinking of this world. Perhaps they were busy blaming each other for forgetting to bring bread with them on the trip when Jesus gave them the warning (really a little parable). They had failed to see the spiritual meaning and, worse still, had forgotten that Jesus could and would meet any bodily needs of those seeking God's kingdom; he had shown that in the feeding miracles already. This time, Jesus rebuked them bluntly

(21). They should have seen that the yeast of the Pharisees was their whole attitude to life, which would affect the disciples unless they took care. We too need to be constantly on our guard against the 'spirit of the age' or the thinking and teaching of the other religions that surround us. Christ's way is totally different from the way of the world, [p. 963] which we read about in papers, hear on radio, or see on television

8:22-26 Healing a blind man. This last example of the powers of the kingdom of God may be a picture of the spiritually blind disciples, so soon to receive their sight. Friends brought a blind man to Jesus; their faith as well as his, would be rewarded. They led the blind man out of the shouting and confusion of the village so that he could listen to Jesus without distraction. To spit on the man's eyes and to lay hands on him are things that a blind man can feel. There is nothing magical about spittle, even if it is the spittle of Jesus; it is only an outward aid to faith and understanding.

Why did this healing take two stages? Was it perhaps because of the man's imperfect faith? Mark does not say. It is enough that Jesus did not leave the man half-healed but persisted until he saw everything clearly. Is this a picture of the way that even Peter would only half-see the truth about Jesus at first? The man was warned to go straight home without going back to the village, where people who saw him might be tempted to follow Jesus only as a healer, not as a savior. There is always a danger where healing miracles take place in the preaching of the gospel that people will come to Christ for the wrong reasons.

I can think of fewer things more difficult than being blind. To live in a world of darkness - never be able to read a book or see a sunset or watch the waves breaking at the crack of dawn. To never be able to watch a bird in flight or the smile of a baby or the royal colors of a rose garden.

But perhaps a greater tragedy would be to have the ability to see without actually seeing. To go through life with one's eyes tightly shut, refusing to ever open them and see the world. The Pharisees had adopted that sort of spiritual blindness. They had witnessed the miracles of Jesus and had heard His teachings and had resolved to

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deliberately close their eyes and stop their ears to the evidence that was so clearly
manifested before them.

Unable to deny His supernatural power, they attribute it to Satan. It is with this spirit
that they come to Jesus now.

The Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him, seeking from Him a sign from
heaven, to test Him.

Sighing deeply in His spirit, He said, "Why does this generation seek for a sign? Truly I
say to you, no sign will be given to this generation." (Mark 8:11-12).

The Pharisees come and ask Jesus to perform a miracle. But this is not a sincere
request. It is made in the midst of an argument. They are making this request in order
to test Him. If He does not perform it, then they will say that He has demonstrated His
inability. If He does perform it, then they will say that He is receiving His power from
Satan.

Jesus refuses to grant a sign. This will mark a turning point in His ministry. Up to this
time, there has been no shortage of signs. There have been an abundance of all sorts
of miracles. But that is over. There will be very few public miracles performed from this
time onward. And none shall be performed in the presence of the Pharisees.

Leaving them, He again embarked and went away to the other side. And they had
forgotten to take bread, and did not have more than one loaf in the boat with
them. And He was giving orders to them, saying, "Watch out! Beware of the leaven of
the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." (Mark 8:13-15).

This warning is unusual in that there were hardly two positions that were further apart
than Herod versus the Pharisees. Talk about an axis of evil. The Pharisees represented
the conservative party. They were nationalistic patriots. They held to the Scriptures.
They believed in angels and a literal resurrection.

Herod Antipas was not even Jewish. His father was an Idumaeen. His mother was a
Samaritan. He held his authority from the hated Romans.

But Jesus lumps them both together. What did they have in common? What could be both the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod?

Leaven always carries with it the idea of INFLUENCE. You take a little piece of leaven and place it in a lump of dough which you are going to bake and that little piece influences the entire lump, causing it to rise.

Both the Pharisees and Herod were parties of influence. They had both seen and/or heard of Jesus. And they had come to some conclusions regarding Jesus. These conclusions are given to us in Mark's account.

The Pharisees had gone on record in Mark 3:22 to say that Jesus performed His miracles by the will and the power of Satan. They identified Him as a demon-possessed man.

Herod had gone on record in Mark 6:14 to say that Jesus was nothing more than the reincarnation of John the Baptist. He did this out of a sense of superstition and guilt over having murdered John in the first place.

Both of these parties had made false assumptions about Jesus. And He warns His disciples against following in their footsteps. When we get to Mark 8:29 Jesus will ask His disciples as to their own assumption of His identity - "But who do you say that I am?"

This is one of the most important questions you can ever be asked. Who is Jesus? It is a life or death question. If you look at Him and see only a Galilean rabbi or a good man or a profound teacher or a miracle-worker, then you have missed Him.

They began to discuss with one another the fact that they had no bread.

And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart?"

"Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember, 19 when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets

"When I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?" And they said to Him, "Seven."

And He was saying to them, "Do you not yet understand?" (Mark 8:16-21).

Instead of hearing and understanding the warning of Jesus, the disciples focused upon their lack of bread. Jesus was speaking of the spiritual. They were looking only to the physical. He was speaking of the spiritual leaven which characterized unbelief. They saw only the leaven which is used in a bakery. And this generates a discussion among the disciples. The discussion is over the fact that they have only a single basket of bread. Seven baskets had been collected the day before. Six had been left behind.

Jesus asks a rhetorical question. He will ask it twice. "Do you not yet understand?"

What is it that they are supposed to understand? What is His point?

It is that they are worried about bread and they have not yet come to terms with the fact that the Creator of all bread is in their midst. They are worried about lunch and they have missed the fact that the One who holds all things together by the word of His power is with them and able to provide for them.

He has already done it. They have seen Him do it. They saw Him feed 5000 people and they picked up 12 baskets of leftovers. They saw Him feed 4000 people and they picked up 7 baskets of leftovers. They have seen so many miracles that it is starting to get monotonous. Yet with all of this, they have missed the central point to which these miracles have been pointing.

Jesus asks the double-barreled question: "Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? They have just seen Him heal a deaf man of his deafness. In the next paragraph, He will heal a blind man of his blindness. Jesus is asking, "Are you also blind and deaf?"

Unbelief of Pharisees & disciples - theme of bread (8:11-21)

And they came to Bethsaida. And they brought a blind man to Jesus and implored Him to touch him. Taking the blind man by the hand, He brought him out of the village; and after spitting on his eyes and laying His hands on him, He asked him, "Do you see anything?"

And he looked up and said, "I see men, for I see them like trees, walking around." Then again He laid His hands on his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored, and began to see everything clearly. And He sent him to his home, saying, "Do not even enter the village." (Mark 8:22-26).

Up to this point, we have been dealing with spiritual blindness. But now we are given an account of a man who was physically blind. The juxtaposition of these two accounts is no accident. This healing of the blind man will serve as an illustration of what Jesus must do to heal spiritual blindness.

This particular healing is unique. It is the only time that we ever see Jesus healing in stages.

First Stage Jesus: Spits onto the man's eyes and lays hands upon him.

The Man: "I see men, for I see them like trees, walking around."

Second Stage Jesus: Lays His hands upon the man.

The Man: Began to see everything clearly.

After the initial work of Jesus, the man looked up and instead of darkness, he could actually make out images. They resembled trees. But there was something wrong with these trees. They were walking. The man had only a partial restoration of his vision. The miracle was not yet completed.

Jesus again laid His hands upon the man. And this time, the man's vision was completely restored.

This brings us to a question. Why did this healing happen in stages? Couldn't Jesus have healed the man all at once? Yes, He could have. But this healing is a parallel to the spiritual work which Jesus is going to do in the lives of the disciples. And I think that is why the healing is accomplished in stages.

You see, your spiritual blindness is not completely removed in a single instant. It is a gradual removal. When you first begin to see Jesus for who and what He is, you do not

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immediately have all knowledge concerning Him. Such knowledge is gained bit by bit.
Here a little, there a little. Line upon line and precept upon precept.

There are people today in our churches who are like these disciples. You couldn't say that they were bored with spiritual things, nor that you couldn't make sense of people like that. We've all come across such people in every congregation we've attended; they are drawn to church, but they haven't seen what Christ is all about. You may in fact be one of them. You keep coming to church and something is there in your heart and life. You can be touched by Jesus. You are finding out more about him, and you can see something special and important in him. You are certainly seeing more than you once did, but you are still not able to get it all in focus. Like this man Jesus touched, you're not blind any longer, but you don't quite see either. You know there's something quite magnetic about the Lord Christ, but you can't say for sure that you know that he is the Son of God and your Savior, just 'somehow'. While you won't say that you're definitely not a Christian, neither can you say that you are one. You feel touched by the Lord, and you are certainly seeing more than you once did, but still it looks blurry, and hard to define. If that's where you are, then you are precisely the person the Lord had in mind when he chose to do this miracle in this way. You're the sort of person God is talking to through this story in the Bible. Let me use the analysis of such people of a very great physician of souls, the late Dr D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones of Westminster Chapel, London. He believed that there were three areas of confusion in such people:

First of all they have no clear understanding of certain principles.

That is why I was careful to say that they have seen that Christ is 'somehow' the Savior. But they do not see how he is the Savior. They are not clear, for instance, about the death of Christ and its absolute necessity. Neither are they clear about the doctrine of the rebirth. You talk to them about these things and you will find that they are full of confusion. They say that they do not see, and they are quite right! They do not see, they do not understand why Christ had to die, they do not see the necessity of the rebirth. You are familiar with them, they are dissatisfied with their own lives, and

they praise the Christian life. They are ready to talk about Christ as Savior, but still they 'cannot see' certain truths. The result is that they are troubled and unhappy and miserable.

The second thing they do not see clearly is that their heart is not fully engaged.

Though they are able to see many things, they do not really find their happiness in Christianity and in the Christian position. Somehow or another they are not moved by it, they do not find real joy in it. They always have to remind themselves of it and are ever trying to pull themselves up to it. They are not happy; they still seem to find their joy, as far as they have any, somewhere else; their heart is not fully engaged.

The third thing that is true about the people under discussion is that their will is divided.

They are rebellious, they do not see why a man, because he calls himself a Christian, has got to do certain things and stop doing others. They think that is being narrow. Yet they denounce the old life and embrace the Christian life in general. They acknowledge Christ as Savior and yet when it comes to the question of the application of his teaching through the will, there is confusion and they are not clear about it. They are always arguing about this, always asking if it is right for them to do this and that. There is a lack of ease in the realm of the will. I am not caricaturing these people. I am giving a very literal, accurate and detailed description of them. There are many of us who have been through this stage and know it from actual experience; and as our Lord adopted this particular procedure physically in the case of this blind man. He seems sometimes to do something similar in conversion. There are people who at once see things clearly; there are others who go through stages. We are dealing now with those who go through this particular stage, and that is how I would describe their condition (Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "Spiritual Depression," Pickering & Inglis, London, 1965, pp. 42&43)

Have you seen Jesus? Have you recognized Him as the Messiah? The Christ? That is good. But don't stop there. There is more to see. Keep on looking at Jesus.