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# ***Do you not yet see?***

## Jesus and the blind man in Bethsaida (*Mark 8:22-26*)

The gospels sometimes include stories that stand out because they do not seem to fit the character of the narrative of Jesus' life. While we know that God carefully placed everything in the gospel accounts (*John 20:30-31; II Timothy 3:16-17*), sometimes the logic behind some of the stories can evade our understanding.

Mark's account of Jesus healing a blind man in Bethsaida offers one example of those curious stories God included in the gospels. Let's therefore consider the story and see how the healing fits into Mark's larger narrative and how that placement can help us understand God's will for our lives today.

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### ***The setting of Jesus' healing***

- While the gospels record a number of incidents where Jesus miraculously healed people, this account stands out because of its two-step process (*Mark 8:23-25; cf. John 9:14-15*).
  - Most accounts of Jesus' healings stress their demonstration of his power and the truthfulness of his claims.
  - The inclusion of a rare second step should consequently motivate us to ask why Jesus included it and what he intends us to take from it.
- We need to consider the context surrounding the miracle to begin to answer why Mark included this two-step miracle in his gospel.
  - Beginning in chapter six, Mark includes stories of people's struggles with Jesus identity.
    - Mark 6:1-6 recounts the rejection Jesus experienced in his unbelieving hometown.
    - Mark next includes Herod's response to Jesus, who refused Jesus' messianic identity in favor of his guilt-induced belief that Jesus was a resurrected John the Baptist (*Mark 8:14-16*).
    - After describing John the Baptist's death, Mark quickly moved to a story that narrated the apostles own hard-hearted response to Jesus' feeding of the five thousand men (*Mark 6:51-52*).
    - Chapter seven records Jesus' condemnation of the Pharisees for "invalidating the word of God" and his chastisement of his disciples for sharing in some of the Pharisees' failings (*Mark 7:1-23*).
    - Mark chapter eight continues to expose the misunderstandings about Jesus, describing two events that sandwich the account of the blind man's healing.
      - Mark 8:14-21 describes Jesus' frustration over his apostles continued misunderstandings after witnessing him for a second time feed thousands of people.
      - Mark 8:31-33 recounts Jesus' strong condemnation of Peter after Peter rebuked him for telling the disciples that he would be killed.

- Considering the context of misunderstandings about his identity, Jesus two-step healing of the blind man emphasized his problems seeing and allowed the incident to become a teaching experience for his disciples.
  - Although the disciples followed Jesus, they struggled with their understandings (*Mark 6:51-52; 7:17-18; 8:17-21, 31-33; 9:14-29*).
  - The disciples' misunderstandings affected their hearts and their receptivity of Jesus' teachings (*Mark 6:51-52; 8:17*).
  - The healing of the blind man provided Jesus as occasion to act out a parable through his healing of the man in an effort to teach his disciples about their need for clarity.
    - But their clarity of vision/mind would not come easily; their ingrained misunderstandings lasted until after Jesus' resurrection (*Mark 16:9-14*).
    - The two-step healing also demonstrated Jesus' commitment to healing them and his ability to accomplish it.
    - Following Jesus' healing of the blind man, Mark's gospel places the disciples at the first step of the two-step process as Peter confesses Jesus' identity while misunderstanding the purpose of that identity (*Mark 8:27-33*).

### ***Learning from Jesus' healing***

- Jesus' healing of the blind man reminds us that we need clarity in our vision/thinking because, if those closest to Jesus could misunderstand him and his mission, then surely we can misunderstand it too.
  - Consider the misunderstanding or rejection of Jesus' teachings about the exclusive nature of service to God that seems so widespread in the larger religious world today (*Matthew 22:34-38; 5:17-19; 23:23; John 14:15*).
  - We have to therefore be careful that we do not develop a clouded vision of Jesus. Our clouded vision can, for example, manifest itself in the following ways:
    - Like many of the Jews of Jesus' time, we can allow our nationalism to be more important than our holiness in our understanding of religion.
    - We can trivialize the message of the gospel by allowing our biases to motivate us to focus on people like ourselves rather than on those who most need Jesus.
    - We can cloud both our vision and other people's vision of Jesus by reducing the church to merely doctrinal differences rather than emphasizing the role of Jesus in defining the look and thinking of the church today.
- Mark's account of Jesus' healing of the blind man also encourages by showing that Jesus has both the patience and the power to overcome our limitations.

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Jesus' healing of the blind man served as a reminder to his disciples, and to us today, of the need for clarity in our thinking. Let's be careful to head the message of that healing and make sure that we keep our minds free from the clouding influences that seek to disrupt our understandings of Jesus and his will for our lives.