

# More than Just Miracles: Healing the Blind Man

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Today we are continuing with our consideration of the miracles of Jesus. This one involves the healing of a blind man near the village of Bethsaida. There are at least seven incidents reported in the Gospels where Jesus heals the blind.<sup>1</sup> But, the one we'll review is found in the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of Mark—and it's a bit different from the rest, because it has a little of a twist to it. Mark tells us: <sup>22</sup> When they [referring to Jesus and the disciples] arrived at Bethsaida, some people brought a blind man to Jesus, and they begged him to touch the man and heal him. <sup>23</sup> Jesus took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village. Then, spitting on the man's eyes, he laid his hands on him and asked, "Can you see anything now?" <sup>24</sup> The man looked around. "Yes," he said, "I see people, but I can't see them very clearly. They look like trees walking around." <sup>25</sup> Then Jesus placed his hands on the man's eyes again, and his eyes were opened. His sight was completely restored, and he could see everything clearly. <sup>26</sup> Jesus sent him away, saying, "Don't go back into the village on your way home."

What is so interesting about this story is that it records a very rare occasion where Jesus' first attempt to heal someone of blindness was not completely successful, and this makes the miracle rather odd. So we have to ask ourselves, what is going on here? And as we take a closer look, we can see that quite a lot is going on here. In fact, there are several things that are presented in this story that help us to re-examine our faith in light of the two-step healing process that is presented in this miracle.

One lesson we learn is that our faith can be affected by where we position ourselves. This blind man, for some unknown reason, had positioned himself (or perhaps his friends had positioned him) in the village of Bethsaida. Bethsaida means the "house of the fisher". It apparently derived its name from the fact that this village was located on the eastern side of the Jordan River where it flows into the Sea of Galilee—this body of water, of course, served as the principal fishing area for the entire region.<sup>2</sup> But if someone were trying to nurture their faith, Bethsaida was not the place to be. Some theologians believe that Jesus was unable to heal this man on the first try because Bethsaida had been condemned by Jesus because of the lack of belief on the part of its residents. They suggest this because, back in Mark chapter 6, it was reported that due to the lack of faith on the part of the people around Jesus' home town of Nazareth, Jesus was unable to perform many miracles there.<sup>3</sup> The people of Bethsaida were apparently much worse when it came to faith, because nobody there responded to the miracles that Jesus did, in fact, perform. And because of that, Jesus condemned the village of Bethsaida for that very reason.<sup>4</sup>

Now I can agree with these theologians only to a limited degree here. I agree that if we want our faith to grow and flourish that we cannot constantly put ourselves in places where God is scorned and faith is ridiculed. That why the Book of Psalms begins by telling us: “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers.” Psalm 1:1 (ESV) However, I do not agree that Jesus’ two attempts to heal this blind man were any indication of a lack of His ability to heal. Rather, Jesus healed this man in two stages deliberately—and He did so to teach us some valuable lessons.

For one thing, Jesus is teaching us that He is willing to heal anyone just as quickly as their faith will allow<sup>5</sup>—just as quickly as they will truly surrender their lives to Him. It could well have been that this man’s spiritual condition was not ready for healing—or at most, only partial healing. All the man could see, at first, were blurry objects whereby people appeared as tree-like figures swaying in the wind. The sad thing is that some people seem content to remain in that less than healed state. They tend to treat the initial healing process as if it were the final one and simply walk away without the benefit of the full treatment. One of the commentators puts it so well in writing: “When patients begin to feel better, they begin to skip prescribed treatments. Without a firm commitment to ‘seeing clearly,’ people may mistake impaired health for true spiritual health.”<sup>6</sup>

To the blind man’s credit, upon this first partial healing, he didn’t say, “Thank you, Jesus!—That’s quite enough healing for me. I’ll see you later,”—and then go stumbling off with nothing but impaired vision to guide him. That would have been a foolish thing for him to do. And, as crazy as that kind of reaction would have been, that is the way that some people treat the development of their Christian faith. In other words, they never really let it grow. They go rushing off before allowing Jesus to fully heal them—and that is an incredibly dangerous thing to do.

It reminds me of our beagle dog—the one we named, “Bugs Bunny”—or just plain ole “Bugs” for short. Bugs was one of the best beagle dogs that my Dad had in his pack of hounds that we rabbit hunt with. But about three years ago, during a particularly wet and cold part of the winter, she became separated from the rest of the beagles and got lost. We looked for her high and low for well over a month, but Bugs was nowhere to be found. When she was eventually found, she had almost starved to death. And, for whatever reason (that no veterinary has been able to explain), she came back virtually blind in both eyes. Flo nursed her back to health and now she is pretty much a pet. Her sight is limited to about two or three feet in front of her, and she’s allowed to roam around a bit in the pasture next to her pen just before she is fed at night, and then returned to her pen. But, the week before last, Bugs didn’t follow her usual routine. She was supposed to go back into her pen where her bowl of dog feed

awaited her. Rather, she ventured off (probably on a rabbit or deer trail) and night fall found her about a quarter mile back in the woods—and we weren't certain as to what direction she had gone. And when it gets dark, she cannot see a thing. So she just sat there, too terrified to move or even howl. And she had a good reason to be terrified because we have coyotes all around where we live. They run in packs at night and have been known to prey upon and eat the small dogs that they come upon at night. So, Flo and I got in the pickup and—took a chance that Bugs might be along the edge of an old road that meanders a good distance back into the woods. And, in the darkness, as we approached the end of that road, we came upon the happiest beagle dog that I believe I have ever seen. Apparently, she could make out just enough of the headlights from our pickup truck that she gained enough courage to venture out of the woods, and came running straight to the light. Up to that point in time, Bugs was in great danger because—I kid you not—the coyotes had already started to howl in anticipation of a beagle night-time snack.

Some people act a good bit like that beagle dog. They let Jesus touch them once, but fail to allow their faith to grow. And rather than allowing Jesus to complete the healing process that will permit their faith to mature, they go running partially blind down some rabbit trail until darkness descends upon them. And when the evil of the world pounces upon them, they are as helpless as a blind beagle to defend themselves.

The blind man wasn't like that. His faith may have been but a flicker at first. But, he soon responded to Jesus' first touch and to the light that began to fill his life. And he was wise enough, and faithful enough, to allow Jesus to finish the job—apply that second touch that restored his sight. He allowed Jesus to take him from a world of darkness, to one in which he could see a little bit, but only in a distorted way, and finally to a world of the light and clear sight that only the Savior can provide. Thus, Jesus' miracle was two-fold: First, He allowed the man to see; then Jesus' finishing touch allowed him to *comprehend* what he was seeing.<sup>7</sup> And this served to bring great joy to his life—for he no longer groped in darkness, nor did he continue to see the world in a distorted way.

A man named Michael May was a lot like that. Mr. May had been blind since the time he was 3 years old. But, at the age of 45, he was again able to see again through eye transplant surgery. Like most patients who are blessed to have their vision restored, he was overjoyed as a world full of light and color and motion surrounded him. But soon he found that there were new challenges to overcome. When people suddenly can see, they struggle with depth perception. They have trouble understanding distances and have difficulty grasping the contours of three-dimensional objects. They often find it hard just to read facial expressions on people's faces, or even to be able to detect gender distinctions

between males and females. When they first regain their sight, these can be extremely frustrating hurdles to overcome and the transformation process into the world of sight can be very traumatic. But that is not the way it was for Michael May.

True, he experienced all of these problems with his perception, just like most everyone else who goes through such surgery. But, unlike the other patients, his doctors found him to be remarkable because he didn't get discouraged by the long learning curve that lay before him. Rather, his initial joy and wonder never seemed to dissipate—it simply grew from day to day. He seemed to immediately adopt the attitude that everything that he experienced from the instant he regained his sight would be part of a lifelong journey to learn and grow and mature. While other patients had felt depressed by their sometimes slow transformation into a world of sight and light, Michael May approached the entire process as a great adventure where both his failures and successes gave him new opportunities to change for the better. I think the man Jesus healed was a lot like that—and so are we when Jesus truly restores our spiritual vision. Moving through the ups and downs of life has a brand new feeling when Jesus is constantly soothing our eyes in a way that our focus is more on Him and less on the world.<sup>8</sup>

But the problem is that some people aren't like that. Their problem is that they won't stay with Jesus. Incredibly, they can't be bothered to give Him the time to heal them completely. You rarely, if ever, see them at Church. They have a Bible, but it's covered with dust. They might pray in times of desperation—but otherwise, they don't give God the time of day. Instead of being able to see with the spiritual eyes that Jesus longs to give them, they seem quite content to remain either blind, or with a dim and distorted worldview. Believe it or not, some of them are even adept at quoting Scripture. Yet, if you listen to them or observe their behavior, it becomes obvious that they do not have a clue as to what they are quoting. Or, worse yet, if they do understand what Scripture says, their spiritual vision is so distorted that they cannot see that the way they are living completely contradicts what God's Word has to say. That is what happens when you rush off from Jesus and fail to receive complete healing. People like that are no better off than a blind beagle—and in a lot more danger. They validate the old proverb: "There are none so blind, as those who will not see."

But, we cannot be like that. Open yourself to the lifelong healing process that Jesus Christ offers to you—a process by which you allow Him full access to your life. If you do that, then you will grow in your faith as your spiritual eyes become keener and keener. It is what true followers of Jesus must do. I think that the Apostle Peter sums all of this up best when He writes: <sup>5</sup> In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God's promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, <sup>6</sup> and knowledge with self-control, and self-control

with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness,<sup>7</sup> and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone.<sup>8</sup> The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup> But those who fail to develop in this way are *SHORTSIGHTED OR BLIND*, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their old sins.<sup>10</sup> So, dear brothers and sisters, work hard to prove that you really are among those God has called and chosen. Do these things, and you will never fall away.<sup>11</sup> Then God will give you a grand entrance into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 1:5-11 (NLT)

When we begin to open our eyes to see that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life, and ***keep Him near***—He will heal us . . . in so many ways. We will no longer see people as if they are trees. And if we will allow Jesus to continue touching our spiritual eyes, we will begin to see that we cannot continue to treat people like trees. We will stop climbing all over them, cutting them down, carving them up, or throwing them in the fire. We will continue to develop those spiritual traits that Peter mentions in the Scripture that we just read. When you truly see Jesus for who He is, nothing will look the same again. Look again at Mark 8:23 (NLT). It tells us: ***Jesus took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village. Then, spitting on the man's eyes, he laid his hands on him and asked, "Can you see anything now?"*** The thing is: Jesus asks you the same question today. And if your answer is, "Yes, but things are a little blurry," then give Jesus a chance—stick with Him for the long haul. You'll be amazed at what you will see.

Let us pray.

Forest Hill Baptist Church  
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Darvin Satterwhite, Pastor ©2018

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<sup>1</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary – Be Diligent (Mark)*, (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 2003), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 138.

<sup>2</sup> Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, ed., *Expositor's Bible Commentary, Revised – Matthew-Mark*, Revised ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 822.

<sup>3</sup> Mark 6:4-5 (NIV) <sup>4</sup> Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor." <sup>5</sup> He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 11:21-22 (NLT) <sup>21</sup> "What sorrow awaits you, Korazin and Bethsaida! For if the miracles I did in you had been done in wicked Tyre and Sidon, their people would have repented of their sins long ago, clothing themselves in burlap and throwing ashes on their heads to show their remorse. <sup>22</sup> I tell you, Tyre and Sidon will be better off on judgment day than you).

<sup>5</sup> Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, ed., *Expositor's Bible Commentary, Revised – Matthew-Mark*, Revised ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 823.

<sup>6</sup> The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, Vol. VII, Mark 8:22-26, Abington Press/Nashville; p. 468.

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<sup>7</sup> Lou Barbieri, "Mark," in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, ed. Michael Rydelnik and Michael Vanlaningham, (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 2014), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1532.

<sup>8</sup> "After Operation, Blind Man Slowly Learns to See," adapted from Robert Kurson, "Into the Light," *Esquire* (June 2005), <http://www.preachingtoday.com /search>.