

FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

I was sitting in the doctor's office a couple of weeks ago and there was a model of the human eye on the shelf, and it impressed upon me three things—two of them matter, and one of them does not matter in the least. Let me start with the one that doesn't matter: This model eye ball was the size of a large grapefruit. And I just couldn't help but imagine the size the head that it would go with—It would have been a Goliath sized head at the very least. That one you can forget about—not important.

But, the other two things are important. First, in looking at the intricate design of this eyeball—the shape and flexibility of the lens, the precise area from the lens to the back of the eyeball, the area comprised of the retinal fluid, the unbelievable complexity of the retinal screen. (In fact, I googled it when I got home and found that the retina itself is comprised of over 135 million cells!). And then the retina is connected to the incredibly complex optic nerve that converts light into electro-chemical impulses and transmits them to our brains. And looking at all of this, I had to laugh at the thought that supposedly intelligent people believe that all this incredible intricacy came about in some random fashion by evolution. The whole notion just seems so ridiculously ludicrous! Only God could design and create something so amazing—our eyeball alone has the fingerprints of God all over it!

And the second thing that came to mind is something that I would like to follow up on this morning. It's the fact that Jesus was such a compassionate miracle healer that he could simply step forward and cure someone without much more than His Word and a touch of His Hand. The doctors did a battery of tests on me before they could even begin to tell me what the problem was, yet Jesus knew immediately what to do just upon approaching a blind person and He could rectify their vision in no time at all. Today doctors have all this complex modern gadgetry (for which I am certainly grateful), but the only thing Jesus used was His power and the person's faith, and they'd be completely restored from total blindness. And that's what makes Jesus' miracles in healing the blind all the more remarkable: He would take people who were living in total darkness and bring them into the light and they could see clearly again.

In the ancient world, as is the case today, there was no shortage of blind people. And as you might imagine, back in the first century A.D. there were so many causes of blindness and virtually no cures. For example, a baby could be born blind due to developmental defects or as the result of prenatal infections. Or, more commonly, eye diseases, such as trachoma, brought on by contagious bacterial infections often resulted in blindness. In fact, it still is a leading cause of blindness today,

affecting over 1.9 million people.¹ In ancient times, leprosy could cause blindness. In old age, cataracts developed and there was no surgical means to stem the onset of blindness. In fact, almost no effective medical treatments were available to aid those who suffered from conditions that eventually led to the loss of their sight. A lot of people had to spend their lives in total darkness. And so, miraculous healings were often sought, but none came.

That was the reality until Jesus arrived upon the scene and changed all that by shedding amazing, wonderful Light all around.² On at least four occasions, the Gospels report that Jesus healed people from blindness. I am sure that He did it many more times than that as well. Let's take a look at one of those miracles this morning. It is actually the first "**healing of the blind**" miracle in the New Testament and it is found in Matthew 9—which tells us: ²⁷ **As Jesus went on from there** [referring to a house in which Jesus had just raised a little girl from the dead—a pretty big miracle in and of itself!], **two blind men followed him, calling out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!"** ²⁸ **When He had gone indoors, the blind men came to Him, and He asked them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" "Yes, Lord," they replied.** ²⁹ **Then he touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith will it be done to you";** ³⁰ **and their sight was restored. Jesus warned them sternly, "See that no one knows about this."** ³¹ **But they went out and spread the news about Him all over that region.** Matthew 9:27-31(NIV)

Now, what is being taught here? What is the central lesson that we are to take away from this healing episode? Was this miracle performed by Jesus to spur on people's scientific curiosity in order that they'd try to cure diseases through medical advancements?—perhaps so that someday we'd develop laser surgeries to fill holes in retinas and all the amazing medical cures we have today? No, of course not! Jesus wasn't trying to give science lessons here. Science has to do with natural cause and effect. What Jesus was doing was a true miracle that was performed on a **supernatural** basis. I think that this miracle, as all of Jesus' miracles, shows us at least three things. **No. 1:** It confirms Jesus' great power and His identity as the Son of God. And **No. 2:** It provides an amazing picture of God's mercy and grace to those who look to Him in faith during their most hopeless and desperate times. And so we are blessed that the Gospel writers themselves faithfully reported Jesus' miracles to us—especially this particular miracle involving the healing of the two blind men. These are immensely important lessons, and yet I believe that there is a **third lesson** here that we sometimes miss. Let's save that one for the end.

But, note this: Physical blindness is not, in and of itself, usually deadly. But did you know that there are even more prevalent forms of blindness that are absolutely lethal unless they are cured? They actually do not have any medical terms to describe them because they are not medical conditions.

Rather, they reflect a chronic spiritual condition. It's a condition, if left untreated, that only worsens over time—because if anyone is infected with the **disease of sin** and refuses the cure, then they will eventually **lose sight of God** and become **spiritually blind**. And if they die in the condition, they will ultimately end up in a **place of total darkness** called **Hell**.

What is so hard to explain is that spiritual blindness seems to be especially prevalent among those who **should** have the best godly sight of all. This has long been the case. Throughout the history of the nation of Israel, God's people have suffered from spiritual blindness. From the beginning, God had intended the nation of Israel to be a light to help bring the world out of its spiritual darkness. But God became so frustrated with Israel's repeated failures of faith that He declared Israel to be not only blind in faith, but deaf as well. Through the prophet Isaiah, God was speaking to the nation of Israel when He told them: ¹⁸ **"Oh, how blind and deaf you are toward God! Why won't you listen? Why won't you see?"** ¹⁹ **Who in all the world is as blind as my own people, who are designed to be my messengers of truth? Who is so blind as my 'dedicated one,' the 'servant of the Lord'?"** ²⁰ **You see and understand what is right but won't heed nor do it; you hear, but you won't listen."** Isaiah 42:18 (TLB) I wonder how many times God says that same thing to the Church in America today? How many times does He look down from Heaven and say that to you and me individually?

What God expected of Israel in guiding the world to His Light, He expects today of both the Church and of us as His people. Did God ever tell **us** this? Yes, He most certainly did—through the words of His Son, Jesus Christ, who tells us: ¹⁴ **"You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden."** ¹⁵ **No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house."** ¹⁶ **In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father."** Matthew 5:14-16 (NLT2) God sends us upon the same mission that He sent Israel **"to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon, and those sitting in darkness from the prison house."** Isaiah 42:7 (HCSB) And so, we do not want to miss those opportunities to be a light to those who may be spiritually blind. In the way we live, and by the things we do and say, we are called to offer them a glimmer of hope in Christ. Some of them don't know about God or His Son, Jesus. They have never heard of the Holy Spirit. And those who seem to walk about freely at work or at school or among your friends and family, many of them are not free at all, but rather are imprisoned in that dungeon of darkness yearning to be set free. God wants to use you as the key to unlock those chains that bind them. As William J. Thoms once said, **"Be careful how you live. You may be the only Bible some person ever reads."**³ If they know you to be a Christian, what will they **"read"** as they study the things that you do and say? Do our actions leave them in

darkness or bring them to light? They are questions worth considering for anyone who claims to be a follower of Christ.

Many times some so-called Christians today are so spiritually blind that they are no more faithful than ancient Israel was in this regard. They think of themselves as good, pious people when, in fact, they are basically Christian hypocrites. You could equate this to someone who is contagious with the corona virus, but doesn't seem to realize it—and they walk around in public sneezing and coughing on everyone. Their fake Christian airs never cover up their corrupt and immoral lifestyles. Now they might fool some people, but they are never going to fool God. They remind me of the Pharisees—those Jewish leaders who thought they could hide their guilt from Jesus. Jesus, in effect, called them out for being spiritually blind. John chapter 9 captures Jesus' dialogue with them as follows: ⁴⁰ **"Some Pharisees who were with Him heard Him say this and asked, 'What? Are we blind too?'"** ⁴¹ **Jesus said, 'If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.'**" John 9:40-41 (NIV)

And yet we have the two blind men in Matthew 9—while their physical eyes were blind—they could see spiritually much clearer than anyone who was walking with Jesus that day. It is said that the blind develop their other senses all the more keenly to compensate for their loss of vision. Typically, their hearing or touch is enhanced far beyond those who can see. These two blind men in Matthew's Gospel did exactly that—they developed a heightened compensating sense, but it had nothing to do with hearing or touching. Rather, the sense that they developed was a heightened spiritual awareness far beyond those people whose physical eyes were functioning well, but whose own spiritual eyes were partially, if not totally, blind. So what is it about these two blind men that tips us off as to their keen spiritual sight even before Jesus heals them?

Well, look at verse 27 and what they said to Jesus when they first **"saw"** Him. They turned to Jesus and cried out: **"Have mercy on us, Son of David!"** Now what was the significance of that?—calling Jesus the **"Son of David."** Well, **"Son of David"** is a messianic title. In other words, these two blind men were publically confessing that they recognized Jesus as **the Messiah**. And that had extremely important implications. When Jesus once asked His disciples, **"Who do you say that I am?"**, Peter answered, **"You are the Messiah."** Mark 8:29 HCSB And even before that Peter's brother, Andrew, had come to the same conclusion when he first met Jesus—recognizing Him as the Messiah.⁴ But, there was still a great deal of **blindness** on His disciples' part when it came to what the title of **"Messiah"** actually meant as far as Jesus' mission in the world was concerned. Many of Jesus' followers thought of the Messiah as being a great **warrior-king** who offered political and military power like a **"King David."** And

he'd sweep the Jews' enemies from the land—especially those hated Roman legions that then occupied the former nation of Israel. But, Jesus did His best to correct that faulty notion on the part of His followers. They erroneously thought that Jesus had come to defeat, and then judge, the Romans. But, Jesus taught that He did not come to judge the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.⁵ And so, Jesus tried to tell them: ³¹ **“The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill Him, and after three days He will rise.”** ³² **But they did not understand what He meant and were afraid to ask Him about it.”** Mark 9:31 (NIV) And because they did not understand, they were the ones who remained blind.

Many people in Jesus' day liked to think of Jesus as someone who would grant their wishes if they would just say that they were one of His followers. They looked to Him as someone who'd defeat their political enemies, perform miracles that produced bread and fish to feed them⁶, and would heal them of sickness and diseases. Sometimes people today make the same mistake as these disciples did early-on. Those who preach the so-called ***“prosperity gospel”***⁷—they see Jesus as some kind of ***“Holy Santa Claus”*** who will make their lives a bed of roses with blessings of wealth and prosperity. And so, they offer misleading teachings as to what God's blessings actually entail. Unfortunately, they either consciously or unconsciously motivate people to believe in Christ for all the wrong reasons. But, for those who ***truly have faith*** in Jesus Christ—and as part of that faith understand that ***He calls us to carry our crosses along with Him***⁸—Jesus will be their Savior. But being their ***Lord and Savior*** is a very different thing than being their ***Santa Claus***. Do you know why Jesus told those two blind men to make sure that they kept this miracle a secret and not spread news of it all around? It was because Jesus wanted people to ***come to Him in faith*** to find out the Truth about God. Jesus wanted followers who were ***hungry for knowledge about God*** and who were ***longing to have a relationship with Him***, and not just hungry to fill their bellies—looking for some miracle-worker for no other reason than that He would feed them or heal their ailments or defeat their enemies.

And in these two blind men, Jesus found such men of faith. They weren't looking for someone to kick out the Romans. They were looking for—and indeed had found—their Savior who would bring Light into their world! The prophets of old had looked to this very time in which these blind men were living as the great ***messianic age***—a new and wonderful age in which **“the eyes of the blind [would be] opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped,” and “the lame [would] leap like a deer, and the mute tongues [would] shout for joy”** at the recognition that their Messiah had finally come.⁹ And when Jesus put these two blind men's faith to the test, He asked if they believed He was able to do this great thing (i.e., give them sight). And they didn't miss a beat in responding, ***“Yes, Lord,”*** we know you can do it.

And so, Jesus saw their faith and touched their eyes and they could immediately see. It's funny that Man says, "**Seeing is believing**;" but, with God it's the other way around: "**Believing is seeing**"¹⁰—seeing, that is, with our **spiritual eyes** and trusting in Jesus for whom He really is—**not a Santa Claus**, but our **Creator, Redeemer and Savior**.

And so, we can see that this isn't just a story about physical healing. We are meant to see something beyond that. This passage portrays what it means for someone, who may appear to be in an overwhelmingly desperate situation, to turn to Jesus Christ as their sole source of hope—and then let Him rescue them. And there is no more hopeless situation than the state in which humanity finds itself—a state of darkness, a state of misery—all because the world remains in a **state of imprisonment to sin**. There is no remedy, no solution to that except for "**the powerful, forgiving, saving grace of God, which is to be found in Jesus Christ alone**."¹¹ If you "**see**" this, and **believe** this, and **live** this, then your faith will grow. You will come out of the darkness and into the Light of Christ. The Apostle Peter tells us: ⁵ **For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge;** ⁶ **and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness;** ⁷ **and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, LOVE.** ⁸ **For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.** ⁹ **But if anyone does not have them, HE IS NEARSIGHTED AND BLIND, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.** 2 Peter 1:5-9 (NIV) You don't want to remain **nearsighted and blind**, for as Jesus said in speaking of your spiritual eyes: ²² **"Your eye is a lamp that provides light for your body. When your eye is good, your whole body is filled with light.** ²³ **But when your eye is bad, your whole body is filled with darkness. And if the light you think you have is actually darkness, how deep that darkness is!"** Matthew 6:22-23 (NLT2)

Now in closing, let me tell you about the final lesson that we get out of this narrative about the healing of these two blind men—it's something that is often overlooked. We so admire their faith (as we should) that we too willingly excuse their behavior after they were healed. In Matthew 9:30-31, it tells us that when their sight was restored, ³⁰ **"Jesus warned them sternly, 'See that no one knows about this.'** ³¹ **But they went out and spread the news about him all over that region."** Matthew 9:27-31(NIV) The Greek word for the phrase "**warned them sternly**" is **embrimaomai**. It is a deeply emphatic, extremely forceful word that is used only five times in the entire New Testament. It is as if Jesus were saying, "**Look—I really, really mean this—I'm not messing around—don't tell anybody about what just happened!**" Again, this reflected Jesus' intense desire to avoid having His miracles overshadow the immense importance of His message of salvation. And, of course, the sooner the Jewish leaders realized

that He was the Messiah, the quicker they would try to nail Him to the Cross and thereby shorten the days He would have to enlighten His disciples. And so, this wasn't a mere request on Jesus' part when He told these two now-healed men to be quiet about all of this. Rather, it was an ***emphatic command*** that He expected them to follow. And therein we find the final lesson from this story.

It does very little good to show faith in Christ, if you then refuse to follow His commandments. Now, I know these two guys meant well—they were so appreciative of Jesus' compassion in healing them that they could not contain their joy and went out and told everybody all about it. And yet, they still disobeyed Jesus. And what is more is this: These "***men whose faith brought them to Christ for healing did not [hang around] with Him to learn obedience.***"¹² How many times have you seen that? Someone comes forward confessing faith in Christ—overjoyed, but in a short time, you never see them in church again. The next time you happen to bump into them at Walmart, they are quick to bring up some series of excuses about having to work on Sunday, or some busyness on their part, or whatever they claim has prevented them from coming. And yet, you rarely, if ever see them again in God's House—unless, of course, it's a funeral. The problem is that sometimes they are the one whose funeral is being preached.

Now we don't know what became of these two formerly blind men, but hopefully their faith pulled them back to Christ and they started to add those things to their faith that Peter mentioned—the last and most important one that Peter added is found in **1 Peter 1:7** wherein he told us to add **LOVE** to our faith. Why?—because Jesus said, "***If you love Me, obey My commandments.***" John 14:15 (NLT2) It's sad how quickly spiritual eyes become blind again when the love for Christ is replaced by the things of the world. And maybe **that** is really the central message after all in this wonderful story!

Let us pray.

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¹ Oxford Dictionary.

² Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary.

³ William J. Thoms, www.goodreads.com.

⁴ John 1:41 He first found his own brother Simon and told him, "We have found the Messiah!" (which means "Anointed One"). (HCSB)

⁵ John 3:17 "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. (NASB)

⁶ Matthew 14:19-21 ¹⁹ Then he told the people to sit down on the grass. Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, looked up toward heaven, and blessed them. Then, breaking the loaves into pieces, he gave the bread to the disciples, who distributed it to the people. ²⁰ They all ate as much as they wanted, and afterward, the disciples picked up twelve baskets of leftovers. ²¹ About 5,000 men were fed that day, in addition to all the women and children! (NLT2)

⁷ Wikipedia, under "Prosperity Theology": "Prominent leaders in the development of prosperity theology include E. W. Kenyon, Oral Roberts, A. A. Allen, Robert Tilton, T. L. Osborn, Joel Osteen, Creflo Dollar, Kenneth Copeland, Reverend Ike, and Kenneth Hagin."

⁸ Luke 9:23 ²³ Then he said to the crowd, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross daily, and follow me." (NLT2)

⁹ Isaiah 35:5-6 ⁵ Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. ⁶ Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. (NIV)

¹⁰ Believer's Bible Commentary.

¹¹ Boice Expository Commentary - The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 1: The King and His Kingdom (Matthew 1-17).

¹² Expositor's Bible Commentary, Revised - Matthew-Mark.