



WESTLAKE HILLS
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

"Blindness by Degree"

Sermon Series: "The Way of Jesus"

Mark 8:22-9:1

By: **Dr. Peter B. Barnes**

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(NIV)

The Healing of a Blind Man at Bethsaida

²²They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. ²³He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?"

²⁴He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around."

²⁵Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. ²⁶Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't go into the village."^[a]

Peter's Confession of Christ

²⁷Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"

²⁸They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

²⁹"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Peter answered, "You are the Christ."^[b]

³⁰Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

Jesus Predicts His Death

³¹He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. ³²He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

³³But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

³⁴Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵For whoever wants to save his life^[c] will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? ³⁷Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? ³⁸If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

Mark 9

¹And he said to them, "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power."

Footnotes:

- a. [Mark 8:26](#) Some manuscripts Don't go and tell anyone in the village
- b. [Mark 8:29](#) Or Messiah. "The Christ" (Greek) and "the Messiah" (Hebrew) both mean "the Anointed One."
- c. [Mark 8:35](#) The Greek word means either life or soul; also in verse 36.

Introduction.

Ever since I was seven-years-old I wore glasses whose lenses resembled the bottoms of coke bottles. I was as blind as a bat without them. All that changed for me a few years ago when a member of my church in Boulder came up to me at a choir concert at the local high school where our kids were singing and said, "Peter, I couldn't help noticing your glasses. Have you ever considered intraocular lens implants?"



I said, "Say what?"

John explained the process, which sounded like space-age technology to me, but I was intrigued. I'd always wanted to get eye surgery before, but as I researched the options I discovered I wasn't a candidate for a number of reasons for Lasik or PRK or any of the other procedures many people have had done. However, I had never heard of lens implants which actually replace the lens in the interior of your eye with a prescription acrylic lens.

The results have been nearly miraculous for me, and it's given me a freedom I've never known before, especially in playing sports. And now I even get to wear cool sunglasses!

Even though the process only took about 15 minutes to do, the doctor performed surgery on one eye at a time separated by 10 days, and the time in between the two surgeries was a bit tricky. I couldn't see very well, and I had the devil of a time trying to adjust. I suffered from blindness by degree during those 10 days. At one point I was pretty anxious and wondered if the whole thing was going to work out. The vision in one eye was 20/20, but it was still blurred to some extent, while the vision in the other eye was still extremely near-sighted. I couldn't really see or function very well those 10 days.

Eventually, all the surgery was complete, and I healed up nicely. I feel like a miracle occurred, and I'll be forever grateful that Dr. John Kloor asked me about my eyesight at that choir concert. What a difference the lens implants have made.

This morning we consider a passage which reveals other ways people can suffer from blindness by degree. In the first instance, a blind man's physical sight was restored in a progressive manner so that his eyesight returned in different stages. In the second instance, the disciple Peter experienced at the same time great spiritual insight and great spiritual blindness. Let's take a look at these two stories which are about blindness by degree.

I. A Healing of Blindness.

Our passage begins with a very unusual story of healing. It took place in the village of Bethsaida on the northern edge of the Sea of Galilee. This is the only time in the gospels we read of this incident, and it is also the only time when Jesus healed someone in a progressive or gradual manner. All His other healings were instantaneous. After our Lord touched the man, He asked him, "What do you see?" The man's response was, "Well, I see something. I see people, but they look like trees walking." Some sight was restored, but only partially and greater clarity of vision came later.

It is interesting to note when and where this incident took place. The story of the healing of this blind man is sandwiched in between two stories about the disciples and how they only understood who Jesus was in a partial sense. In other words, they did not see clearly, and they suffered from spiritual blindness to some degree.

In the previous passage, Jesus warned the disciples about the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod. They thought He was chastising them for not bringing enough bread for the trip. At the end of the passage, Jesus asked them, "Do you not yet understand? Can't you connect the dots? Don't you see?" They saw in part, but what the disciples needed was a second touch to clear up their vision.

Later in this passage we see the disciples are confused again. Jesus asked them, "Who do people say that I am?" Only Peter offers the right answer, and, even then, he doesn't clearly understand what all that means. The disciples needed a second touch of the Savior again in order to see it all clearly.

No one sees all of God's truth at once. We all need a second touch, and a third touch, and a fourth touch as we grow in the Christian life. Just when we think our faith in and relationship with Jesus is solid and growing and we feel like we have following Christ all figured out, bang! along comes a problem that shakes our world to the core, or God breaks out like a lion from the nice little box we have tried to put Him in.



Following Jesus is a process of growth and maturity. We see truth in some measure, but we are never in the position where we can think we have arrived. We are all on a journey, a pilgrimage of faith, and as the apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth, "*We see in a mirror dimly [in this life], but one day we shall see face to face*" (1Cr. 13:12).

I remember my freshman year in college coming to terms with this truth. I had given my life to Christ as a teenager at a youth conference and I thought of myself as a Christian, but that freshman year in college God used another student to rock my world and show me just how blind I was to spiritual truth and how far I had to go if I really called myself a follower of Jesus.

Many times in my journey of faith, I've had similar experiences. I thought I understood the way of Christ, I thought I saw things clearly only to discover I suffered from spiritual blindness. I can be so myopic and focus only what's right in front of me and all the while miss the bigger picture of what God is doing in my life and in the world around me, and He has to correct my vision of things.

Sometimes that comes through painful experiences. I find that often God uses difficult times in our lives to get our attention and reveal just how blind we really are. Maybe you're in one of those seasons right now. Things were going well, your life was on a solid track, and you experienced intimacy with God. But now it feels like the wheels have come off. You're not as sure of your relationship with Christ as you once were, you're having a hard time finding solid ground on which to stand, and you wonder where the Lord is in the midst of your crisis.

Let me encourage you to trust that God is using these hard times to correct your vision of things, and He will restore your sight in due time. Trust the Lord even as this blind man had to trust Jesus to restore his sight completely. Christ is the Great Physician, and He's doing some corrective surgery of His own in your life and mine.

II. A Confession of Faith.

As Jesus and His disciples traveled on from Bethsaida to the villages around Caesarea Philippi, He asked them a question, "Who do people say that I am?" The city named Caesarea Philippi was an interesting place at which to pose this question to the disciples.

The city was just over the northern border of Galilee. It was a Greek city, and it was a center for religious worship. During the Old Testament period, it had been a center of the worship of the Canaanite god Baal. When the Greeks took over the region, a great temple to the Greek god Pan was built there. And finally, when Rome conquered the area, they decided to build a statue to Caesar and require emperor worship there. That is how it came to be called Caesarea Philippi. In this setting there were many options available to the people for worship: the tradition of Baal, the tradition of the Greek gods, and the tradition of Roman Emperor worship." (Sounds kind of like Austin in some ways spiritually, doesn't it?)

To the Lord's question "Who do people say that I am?" the disciples reported the various rumors that they had heard. Some of the people thought Jesus was John the Baptist come back from the dead. Others said He was Elijah, the prophet in the Old Testament. Still others thought that Jesus was one of those in the tradition of the prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

Then the Lord asked them the most important question of all, "What about you? Who do you say that I am?" With spiritual insight beyond his own ability to fully understand, Peter spoke up and said, "You are the Christ." Some translations render it, "You're the Messiah," and the two words are interchangeable. Christ is a Greek translation of the Hebrew word for Messiah. Both words mean "anointed one." This idea has found its way into modern film-making in the movie *The Matrix* where Neo was the Anointed One, the Messiah.

The Jews had such hope that the Messiah, the Christ would come and deliver them. They always regarded the greatest days in their history as the time when King David ruled the nation, and they



dreamed of a day when there would arise another king from David's line who would make them a great nation again, and they would rule with power.

The 10 tribes of Israel had been carried off to Assyria and lost forever. The Babylonians conquered Jerusalem and carried their countrymen away as captives. Then the Persians became their masters, then the Greeks, and now the Romans. So the Jews longed the good old days; they longed for a conquering hero who would deliver them, even as God sent Moses to deliver the Israelites from the oppression of the Egyptians 1,500 years before.

The prophets of the Old Testament predicted God would send a Messiah who would deliver the people of Israel, so they looked with expectancy for His appearing. While Jesus fulfilled more than 300 prophecies in the Old Testament concerning the coming of the Messiah, He didn't turn out to be the hero they imagined. They looked for a political and military hero who would conquer their enemies. Instead, Jesus told His disciples here He would suffer many things and be rejected by the religious leaders. They would kill Him, but after three days He would rise again from the dead. The Old Testament also prophesied about this aspect of the Messiah's coming as the Suffering Servant in many biblical passages like Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53, but the Jews didn't pay much attention to those texts. They didn't jive with their nationalistic hopes for a conquering hero.

When Jesus talked plainly about His death as the Messiah, Peter took the Lord aside and began to rebuke Him. A suffering Christ, a dying Messiah was an oxymoron to a Jewish person. There was no such thing. They thought only in terms of a triumphant Messiah.

However, Jesus rebuked Peter for his spiritual blindness, and He said, "Get behind Me, Satan!" Our Lord explained that Peter's preconceived ideas about who and what the Christ was going to be and do was not in keeping with God's plan. It was actually opposed to it, and Jesus said to Peter, "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of man."

All too often we have the wrong idea about God and what He should do in the world, don't we? God is forever having to correct our myopic vision and small ideas about who He is and what He should do, and He breaks out of the boxes we try to put Him in.

One of the great series of books in children's literature is C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*. Lorie and I read these to our boys when they were growing up. In the first book, *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, there is a conversation that Lucy and the other children have with Mr. and Mrs. Beaver about Aslan, the Lion, who is the Christ-figure in the series. Susan asks, "Is he - safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."

"That you will, dearie, and no mistake," said Mrs. Beaver, "if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly."

"Then he isn't safe?" said Lucy.

"Safe?" said Mr. Beaver. "...Who said anything about being safe? 'Course he isn't safe. He's the lion of the wood, I tell you! But he's good."¹

Our God is not a "safe" God; He breaks out of our boxes all the time. But He is good.

Conclusion/Application.

This passage is so rich and full; what can we take home with us this morning? Let me ask you a couple of questions.

1. Is your spiritual vision blurred, or is it clearing? Do you see Jesus in a new light this morning? Do you see your life in a new way? How does God want to correct the way you see Him and your life in Christ today?

2. What are your expectations of Jesus as your Messiah, your Christ, and how might He want to correct your misconceptions? In what ways is Jesus trying to break out of the boxes you've put Him into? Where is He showing you that you've had the wrong idea about Who He is and who you are called to be as His disciple?



John Newton was born into a Christian family in the 18th century. However, at the age of 6 his mother died, and it wasn't long before he became an orphan and wandered the streets of London. On his 11th birthday John went to sea and soon became a teenaged rebel.

He was pressed into service in the navy and once was flogged for desertion. In his 20s he got involved in the African slave-trade, and he came close to starvation while living in extreme poverty in the country of Sierra Leone. In March 1748, at the age of 23, he was the captain on board a cargo ship which was fighting for its life against heavy seas and rough weather in the West Indies, and he called out for God's mercy at the height of the storm. Amazingly he was saved from almost certain death.

Newton saw his deliverance as a miracle, and eventually he renounced his involvement with the slave-trade and at the age of 39 became a pastor. He went on to write many poems and penned perhaps the greatest hymn ever written in the English language, "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind but now I see!"

John Newton once said, "When I get to heaven, I shall see three wonders. The first wonder will be to see many there whom I did not expect to see. The second wonder will be to miss many people whom I did. And the third and greatest wonder of all will be to find myself there!" I was blind, but now I see.

There was a little boy who wore glasses since the age of three. When he was in the first grade, he came home one day very distressed. His mother could tell something was wrong, so she asked him, "Son, what happened today to upset you so?" The boy answered, "It's not fair that I'm not allowed to go to the library." His mother became very concerned and asked, "Why aren't you allowed to go to the library?" With a tearful reply he said, "Because, in order to go to the library you have to have supervision, and I wear glasses!"ⁱⁱ

We all need the supervision of Jesus if we ever want to see things clearly as followers of Christ. May He give us fresh insight into who He is and who it is we are called to be as His disciples so we can overcome our blindness by degree. Amen.

ⁱC.S. Lewis, *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, pp.75,76.

ⁱⁱ Source: Jessie Ragan, Stoney Creek, NC.

