

Jesus and His disciples had just come from the feeding of the 4000 in the Gentile region of the Decapolis. The man delivered from the legion of demons had done a great job in stirring an interest in that region to see and hear from Jesus. That region was ruled by Philip, one of Herod the Great's sons (8:6-9ⁱ). Jesus and His disciples sailed across the lake to Dalmanutha where Jesus was confronted by the Pharisees (8:10,11ⁱⁱ). Then they sailed to Bethsaida. This was the hometown of the disciples who were fishermen. Bethsaida on the eastern side of the Jordan River was the border with Herod Antipas region and Philip's territory. It was in a mostly Gentile region, but this town was inhabited by Jews. We do not know if the blind man in this account and his friends were Jews or Gentiles.

²² *And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him.* Mark 8:22 High on a hill on the eastern side of the Jordan River archeologists found a town. In an excavating of the town, they found one house had some fishing hooks. They took this to indicate that it was the home of five of the disciples who were fishermen. The declared it was Bethsaida and made it a national park. I wondered why fishermen would live so high up above the lake.

Another site right on the lake and adjacent to the Jordan was rejected because an archeologist only found Roman artifacts, even though common sense would say Bethsaida should be in that location. Recently another archeological team dug deeper and began to find Jewish artifacts. Then the discovery that cinched this to be the real location was uncovered. It was a church floor tiles that dedicated the structure to the Apostles. I tried for several years to get to the site, but the overflow from the Jordan River each spring made the road a muddy impassible mess. Finally, my wife and I went without a group in autumn, and we were able to visit the site. The church floor was covered with sandbags, and the excavation was fenced off. They only excavate in the summer when students on summer break can help. Several locals were fishing along the bank of the river and lake. While there was not much to see, we got a sense of the real location and could see that the lake level had to be about the same in Jesus' day.

They came to Bethsaida. This was the hometown of Peter, Andrew, and Philip (John 1:44ⁱⁱⁱ). Some scholars believe James and John were also from this town. Were the disciples visiting family? Surely many of the people of the town had been at the feeding of the 5000. The friends of the blind man knew of Jesus' healing power and brought him to Jesus so that He might touch and heal him. They may have previously received His touch whether through His teaching or perhaps one of them had been healed. Once Jesus has touched you, you cannot forget it.

There were a couple of times when I can say the Lord touched me. The first was when I was five years old. I prayed every night out of the fear of hell to be saved. When the Lord touched me it was with His words, "Don't you want me because I love you?" That was the reason I chose to receive Jesus as my Savior. Another time was when I was 16 years-old with some friends of the same age. No adult offered to lead us in a Bible study, so we just read the Bible and talked about what we thought it was saying to us.

One night the sense of conviction came over us so powerfully we felt we should just pray. Then Jesus touched us and we all began to cry for conviction, grace, and joy. When you have experienced Jesus' touch, you want others to experience it. I think that is what motivated these friends of the blind man. They had faith that Jesus would heal him.

Notice that they begged Jesus to touch the blind man. They did not realize that Jesus desires to touch those who are in need. They did not need to beg, but it did show their faith and the sincerity of their desire to see their friend healed. Blindness was more common in that day. They did not have effective medicines. Lack of sanitation and hygiene were reasons for it being widespread. It made the person completely dependent on others. To have sight restored would completely transform a person's life. They could again be a productive part of the community and not feel they were a burden to their family and friends.

Also notice that the blind man is not mentioned as saying anything. This is a stark contrast to the Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:25,26^{iv}) and blind Bartimaeus who both persistently pleaded with Jesus until they were healed (Matthew 20:30,31^v). But it is like the man who was lowered through the roof (Matthew 9:2^{vi}). When Jesus saw the faith of the friends that brought that man, He forgave and healed the paralytic. In this case too, it was the friends' faith that seems to have prompted Jesus to act.

Hughes believes this man and his friends were Gentiles. While Bethsaida was on the border of the Decapolis, the fact that the five disciples were from this town and that the feeding of the 5000 was nearby with its 12 baskets of leftovers representing the 12 tribes, I do not believe we can know whether the blind man is a Jew or a Gentile, nor is it an essential part of the account.

²³ And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, "Do you see anything?"

²⁴ And he looked up and said, "I see people, but they look like trees, walking." Mark 8:23,24 First, Jesus took the man by the hand and led him out of the village. Wait... Jesus touched him and yet he is not healed? That is because the faith was in those who brought the man to Jesus. If the blind man had faith, the touch of Jesus would have resulted in Him being healed. Is Jesus teaching those who brought the man that it is more than just the touch of Jesus that brings the power to heal? Or perhaps Jesus is encouraging the blind man's faith by doing more than what they expected Him to do. Jesus held his hand for some time as He gently led him out of the village. The man had to place his trust in Jesus leading him. The physical contact conveyed personal concern. This helped the man's faith in Jesus to rise.

Then Jesus did something that He has not done before or as far as we know will never do again. He spit on the man's eyes. In chapter seven He spit and touched the tongue of the deaf and mute man (7:33^{vii}). We are not told what He spit on. In John 9 Jesus spit on the ground and made mud and put it on the eyes of a blind man and told him to wash it off in the pool of Siloam (John 9:6,7^{viii}). I wonder what the man thought when he felt Jesus' spit hit his eyes? This tactile connection was very personal. The expectation of the blind man must have risen even more.

Perhaps Jesus varied and unconventional ways of healing were to assure that no one try to make a formula or write a book on how to spit in blind people's eyes. **The Jesus' formula is to listen to the heavenly Father and do what He tells you.** In this case, the blind man's faith needed to be encouraged step by step.

Then Jesus laid hands on him. What was the difference with taking him by the hand? He is putting His hands on the man's eyes, as we will see in a moment, encouraging the man's faith to rise yet even higher. Instead of hand in hand, now both Jesus' hands are over his eyes.

Jesus asked if the man could see anything. Jesus never asks, "Did it work?" He acts on what the Father tells Him and knows it will be done. A good example is when He raised Lazarus. He prayed a prayer of thanks that the Father had heard His prayer before He call Lazarus out of the tomb (John 11:41,42^{ix}). There was no doubt in Jesus' mind what would happen.

So, what is this halfway healing about? It seems as if Jesus is increasing the man's faith step by step. Jesus works with us in a similar pattern. He knows our lack of faith and leads us in ways that gradually increase our faith. Jesus knows our doubts. He deals with them by putting us in situations in which we see no solution. Do not be surprised at that. Expect Him to teach you to trust Him by faith. Remember the situation and how He brought you through it so that you can apply that faith the next time you find yourself at a dead-end.

This man must have not been born blind but had lost his sight because he knew the difference between what people and trees look like. At that moment people appeared to him as if they were trees walking. He is partially healed. The light receptors in his eyes are sending signals to his visual cortex, but the image is distorted. In the healing of the man born blind, we take for granted that the visual cortex was instantly trained to interpret the signal from the retina of the eye (9:32^x). That is as great a miracle as the nerve pathway being restored. Perhaps it was the first time in years this man had seen light and colors.

Did Jesus fail? Was His power not enough? Or was Jesus intentionally increasing the man's faith? **Is faith more important than sight?** What would you answer if you were blind? Well, the Scriptures tell us that we are to walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7^{xi}). We highly value our sight, but God highly values our faith (Hebrews 11:6^{xii}). To simply heal his eyes and not bring him to faith would be meaningless from an eternal perspective. When God is stretching our faith, it is because He loves us and wants the best for us from His eternal perspective. Can you grasp from this illustration how we so often put the physical over the spiritual, the temporal over the eternal? Which matters more to you?

²⁵ Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. Mark 8:25 The blind man's faith is now peaking as Jesus placed his hands over the man's eyes once more. When he opened his eyes, he could see Jesus and the disciples and the friends who brought him. The way Peter described it to Mark was that the man's vision was perfect, or as we would say, he had 20-20 vision. Jesus did not lack power. The man needed help to increase his faith.

His friends wanted him to see. Jesus wanted to increase his faith. That is a much greater gift, and Jesus gave him both.

We are often like this blind man. We want certain things, even good things, and we focus on obtaining them. But God wants our hearts (Deuteronomy 6:5^{xiii}). We ask Him for healing, for spiritual maturity, for our physical needs, but with those prayers, expectations are attached of how God will answer those prayers. Like the friends of this man, we pray, “Jesus, lay your hands on this situation and make it go smoothly.” But God is in the process of answering another prayer, “Lord, increase our faith.” Luke 17:5^{xiv} Our trials are blessings in disguise. They are Jesus graciously taking our hand and walking us to a place where we trust Him more (James 1:2-4^{xv}).

I highly value time. We have so little of it before we go to glory. I want to accomplish things for the Lord. The Lord, on the other hand, wants to increase my faith and trust in Him more than He wants my good deeds. The day He brought this home to me I spent the entire morning trying to take care of a couple of bills and sign up for something I thought would be a time saver. The computer programs just were not working. They would go in circles, asking me to get the six-digit code. Each program seemed corrupted or I was missing a step somewhere. Finally, I had spent my whole devotional time getting nowhere on paying the bill or getting the program. Then I went for a blood test my doctor had ordered. I am fortunate that there was only one person there before me. They called me in and I told them about the order. They cannot find it. I explained that I had already gone through this at the local hospital, and they told me it was sent to this office. Well, turns out it was sent to the main office and this office for some weird reason must have it sent directly to them. I called and asked it to be faxed to this office fax. Now I am in line again and the line now has three people. Finally, the nurse sees me standing there frustrated and says, “You know that fax can take 24 hours. Ahhh! Now it has been half a day of getting nothing done, or so I thought.

That is when I remembered that the Nazi gestapo would have prisoners in the death camps dig holes the size of a grave and then fill it just to frustrate them with a sense of accomplishing nothing. Then the voice of the Spirit asked me if I could trust Him when it seems that He has me going in circles accomplishing nothing. I thought, “is that serving you?” But what came to mind was, “How can I know what God is doing through what I think is a waste of time? Servants just obey! Do I believe God is sovereign and whatever He allows is for my good?” I responded, “Yes, Lord, I acknowledge that is true but help my heart accept it.” Then I remembered that it is faith that pleases God, not works. **And if the faith results in not seeing what I hope for then it is really faith for faith is the evidence of things unseen (Hebrews 11:1^{xvi}).**

My sight was restored and I saw things clearly. That does not mean I will become blind about some other area of spiritual growth, or that it may dim when I face a repeat of seemingly fruitless hours. But now that I have seen this truth, I have no excuse for not seeing it in future situations. Be careful of limiting God’s way of answering your prayers. He may answer them in ways that increase your faith or teach you the lesson of His way being higher than ours (Isaiah 55:9^{xvii}). We are often so blind we cannot see Him working to fulfill our request in ways that we never considered. It may seem like He is spitting in

your face. If He does, it is out of kindness and love to lead you to a better answer than the one you were seeking.

²⁶ *And he sent him to his home, saying, "Do not even enter the village."* Mark 8:6
Apparently this man did not live in that village. Jesus did not want the village to become excited again about seeing miracles or being miraculously fed. He sent him home to his family, the ones who are the first we testify to of the greatness of our Savior.

Let us step back and take a parallel view of what the Lord might be teaching us about His good news. These people who brought the man to Jesus can be like the people that pray for the salvation of someone. We bring them to Jesus in prayer. Then Jesus takes them by the hand, which I think could be that He gently leads them out of the chaos of the world and its ways. He can do this by sickness, loss, injury, disappointment, being awestruck, or any number of ways. The person senses something spiritual is going on even though they do not understand it. They are led to a quiet place out of their normal routine. Then Jesus touches them in some other way, and they wonder what is going on. They start to see, but not clearly at first. They need another touch of Jesus that affects their mind, their understanding of what is real and true. They begin to see clearly, and their faith is placed fully in Jesus their Redeemer. What do you do next? Go home and tell your family. Does everyone in your family know that you were blind and now you can see? Do they know your testimony? Have they seen a difference in you?

Jesus came to the House of Fishing which is what Bethsaida means. Some people brought Him a fish, but the fish was not biting. So, Jesus chummed the water with little morsels, holding his hand, spitting in his eyes, touching his eyes, giving him partial sight, and the man finally bit. Jesus reeled him. But Jesus is into catch and release. He told him to go tell his family and then on to others what great things the Lord had done for him. And just think of the story the man's friends were going to share. A few years later, disciples from Pentecost would come to that region and people were ready to hear the gospel because Jesus prepared the way through the deliverance of the demoniac, the feeding of the 4000, and the many miraculous healings.

He is still preparing the way in the hearts of people around the world, drawing them to Himself, so that when you share the gospel with them, they will be ready to hear. Expect that He has already been at work in their lives drawing them to Himself.

Questions:

- 1 Which disciples were from Bethsaida?
- 2 Can you recall a time when the Lord touched you?
- 3 Contrast the blind man with others seeking healing?
- 4 Why did Jesus' touch not heal the man?
- 5 What steps may have increased the man's faith?
- 6 What is the Jesus' formula?
- 7 Why would Jesus ask, "Do you see anything"?
- 8 What do you really want the most, the physical or the spiritual?
- 9 How does God increase our faith?
- 10 What may God do to answer our prayers for a person's salvation?

i Mark 8:6-9 (ESV)

⁶ And he directed the crowd to sit down on the ground. And he took the seven loaves, and having given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and they set them before the crowd.

⁷ And they had a few small fish. And having blessed them, he said that these also should be set before them.

⁸ And they ate and were satisfied. And they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full.

⁹ And there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away.

ii Mark 8:10-11 (KJV)

¹⁰ And straightway he entered into a ship with his disciples, and came into the parts of Dalmanutha. ¹¹ And the Pharisees came forth, and began to question with him, seeking of him a sign from heaven, tempting him.

iii John 1:44 (ESV)

⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

iv Mark 7:25-26 (ESV)

²⁵ But immediately a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell down at his feet. ²⁶ Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

v Matthew 20:30-31 (ESV)

³⁰ And behold, there were two blind men sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" ³¹ The crowd rebuked them, telling them to be silent, but they cried out all the more, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!"

vi Matthew 9:2 (ESV)

² And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven."

vii Mark 7:33 (ESV)

³³ And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue.

viii John 9:6-7 (ESV)

⁶ Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud ⁷ and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

ix John 11:41-42 (ESV)

⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me."

x John 9:32 (ESV)

³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind.

xi 2 Corinthians 5:7 (ESV)

⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight.

xii Hebrews 11:6 (ESV)

⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

xiii Deuteronomy 6:5 (ESV)

⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

xiv Luke 17:5 (ESV)

⁵ The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"

xv James 1:2-4 (ESV)

² Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

xvi Hebrews 11:1 (ESV)

¹ Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

^{xvii} **Isaiah 55:9 (ESV)**

⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.