

DO YOU HAVE 20/20 SPIRITUAL VISION?

8 ²²Then they came to Bethsaida. There they brought to [Jesus] a blind man, and begged him to touch him. ²³[Jesus] took the blind man by the hand, and brought him outside of the village. After he had spit on his eyes, and laid his hands upon him, he asked him, Do you see anything? ²⁴[The man] looked up and said, I see men; but they look like walking trees. ²⁵He laid his hands upon [the man's] eyes again; then his eyes came into focus, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. ²⁶[Jesus] sent him away to his home, saying, Do not even enter into the village.

²⁷Then Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. Along the way he asked his disciples, Who do men say that I am? ²⁸And they told him, [Some say you are] John the Baptist; others [say that you are] Elijah; and still others [say that you are] one of the prophets. ²⁹Then he asked them, But who do you say that I am? Peter answered and said to him, You are the Christ. ³⁰He charged them not to tell anyone who he was. ³¹Then he began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³²Now he spoke these things publicly. So Peter took him [aside] and began to rebuke him. ³³But [Jesus], turning around and seeing his disciples, rebuked Peter, and said, Get behind me, Satan; for your mind is not focused on the things of God, but on the things of men. ³⁴Then he called to himself the [whole] crowd along with his disciples, and said to them, If any man desires to be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. ³⁵Whoever wants to save his life, will lose it; but whoever loses his life for my sake and for the [sake of the] gospel shall save it. ³⁶What profit is it for a man to gain the whole world, but to forfeit his life? ³⁷What can a man give in exchange for his life? ³⁸Whoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of man also shall be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels. **9** Then he said to them, I tell you the truth, Some of those who are standing here shall by no means taste of death until they have seen the kingdom of God come with power. (Mk. 8:22-9:1)

See the attached Appendix for the parallel passage of Matthew 16:13-28

Introduction

It was a typical summer Sunday evening. People were scattered throughout the large auditorium, gathered for Sunday evening worship. The service began with the singing of a hymn, followed by a time when anyone could stand up and speak a word of testimony or share a prayer request. One after another several people got up, spoke a brief word or two, and sat down again.

Then Buddy stood up and began to speak. He was thankful that he could be present in the house of the LORD this evening, even though he had to walk more than a mile to get there. Throughout the auditorium you could hear people gasp in surprise. On that Sunday evening when so many others had found it inconvenient to come to the LORD's house, Buddy had come alone; and he had walked more than a mile to get

there. Buddy had walked one dark step at a time. Buddy was blind. (*Our Daily Bread*, 6/26/94)

Yes, Buddy was physically blind; but spiritually he had 20/20 vision. Not only could he see that Jesus was the Lord of glory, worthy of his praise and worship, but that Jesus was worthy of his devotion.

How is our spiritual vision?

I. If You have 20/20 Spiritual Vision, You will Recognize the Centrality of the Cross in Jesus' Ministry (Mk. 8:27-33)

On the way to the district of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asks His disciples the question, "*Who do men say that I am?*"

The disciples respond by informing Jesus of the various opinions circulating among the people: Some say you are John the Baptist, others say that you are Elijah, and still others maintain that you are one of the other Old Testament prophets. Note that each of these views acknowledged Jesus to be a prophetic figure (a spokesman of God) and a mysterious figure. But they all fall short of recognizing His true and full identity.

Then Jesus asked the question, "*Who do you say that I am?*"

On behalf of all the disciples, Peter gives his famous response: "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*" (Matt. 16:16.) This is an amazing statement: Peter correctly identifies Jesus as the promised Messiah who is nothing less than the Lord God Himself. Peter and the other disciples are able to understand the prophecy of Malachi 3:1 and see Jesus as the fulfillment of that prophecy:

Behold, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come, declares Jehovah of hosts. (Mal. 3:1)

Matthew (16:18) records that Jesus now informs Peter and the other apostles, "*upon this rock I will build my church.*" This divinely revealed confession uttered by Peter and preached by the apostles would become the foundation of the church of Jesus Christ.

Although Peter has spoken the truth, he still does not have 20/20 vision. He is like the man described in Mark 8:22-26. That man had received his sight, but he could not distinguish men from trees; there was not only the need for sight, but also for perception and understanding.

That is why, immediately following this great confession, Jesus "*began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer ... and be killed, and after three days rise*

again" (Mk. 8:31.) Upon hearing this, Peter reacts: *"Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, [saying,] 'Lord, this shall never happen to you!'"* Peter shows how incredible and unexpected Jesus' statement was to His disciples: *"the Son of man must suffer."* The disciples understood the origin of the title, *"Son of man,"* but they associated that divine title with dominion, not suffering:

In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. ¹⁴He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. (Dan. 7:13-14)

The identification of the Lord of glory submitting Himself to the suffering of the cross was totally incongruous to the disciples.

Peter's reaction shows how Peter did not fully grasp the significance of his own confession. If Jesus is the Son of man, the Lord of glory, how can Peter possibly dare to rebuke Him? The words that Jesus would speak to Peter on a later occasion (*"What I am doing you do not now understand; but you shall understand,"* Jn. 13:7,) apply now also. Later Peter would understand, and would explain to us the fact that *"Christ ... died for sins once for all, the Righteous One for the unrighteous ones, so that he might bring us to God"* (1 Pet. 3:18.)

If you have 20/20 spiritual vision, you will recognize the centrality of the cross in Jesus' ministry:

... what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. (1 Cor. 15:3-4)

... we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles; ²⁴but for those who are called, (both Jews and Greeks), Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. (1 Cor. 1:23-24)

Christ ... died for sins once for all, the Righteous One for the unrighteous ones, so that he might bring us to God. (1 Pet. 3:18)

II. If You have 20/20 Spiritual Vision, You will Recognize the Centrality of the Cross in the Christian Life (Mk. 8:31-9:1)

We have just seen how Peter's initial reaction to Jesus' revelation of His impending suffering was to rebuke his Lord (vs. 31.) But Jesus now turns and openly rebukes Peter with the words, *"Get behind me, Satan!"* Jesus indicates that Peter at this point is being employed by the devil in yet another attempt to

prevent Jesus from carrying out His Father's will. When we oppose the course the Lord has charted, we are unwittingly aligning ourselves with the devil.

Jesus goes on to inform Peter: *"your mind is not focused on the things of God, but on the things of men."* Peter is in tune with the thinking and the ways of the world—avoid suffering, preserve your life, make no sacrifice. But the way of the Lord is foreign to him—the road that leads to glory goes through the cross.

Peter had taken Jesus aside privately (vs. 32b); but Jesus now calls the whole multitude to Himself and proclaims: *"If any man desires to be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me"* (Mk. 8:34.) Peter sought to restrain Jesus from the cross; Jesus now declares that anyone who would have a part in Him must join Him at the cross. To appreciate the impact of Jesus' announcement to the gathered crowds, we might compare it to this illustration: You have campaigned for the winning candidate for governor. Now at his victory party he invites you to travel with him to the state capitol where, following his inauguration, he will proceed directly to the electric chair and be executed. If you want to have a part in his administration, you must join him.

Note that in Jesus' utterance, the statement, *"let him deny himself,"* occurs in the Greek aorist imperative tense, indicating an initial act of faith and commitment to Christ, the initial moment of conversion. The next statement, *"let him follow me,"* occurs in the Greek present imperative tense, indicating an ongoing, continuous life of commitment, the Christian life of discipleship.

The Lord Jesus declares, *"Whoever wants to save his life, shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for my sake and for the [sake of the] gospel, shall save it"* (Mk. 8:35.) Paradoxically, the course that appears to be safe and sensible and that is most appealing to the self-centered, self-preserving soul, is, in fact, disastrous: it finally results in eternal damnation. Conversely, the course of surrendering our life and our will to the Lord Jesus Christ the Savior is the course that leads to spiritual and eternal life. Notice that Jesus urges us to follow Him to the cross for our benefit. He does so because it is the way that leads to life: "Whoever wants to save his life, will lose it; but whoever loses his life for my sake and for the sake of the gospel, shall save it" (vs. 35.) He does so because of the value of our eternal soul and the tragedy of making a poor investment with regard to it: *"What profit is it for a man to gain the whole world, but forfeit his life [or, soul]?"*³⁷ *What can a man give in exchange for his life [or, soul]?"* (vs. 36-37.)

Notice that Jesus concludes this discourse with a reference to His transfiguration (Mk. 9:1.) The transfiguration provides eyewitness, historical evidence that Jesus is the Son of man, the Lord of glory. The transfiguration provides the assurance that the glory of Christ surpasses all the glory of this world. It is worth the sacrifice of this world to gain a share in that divine glory. It would be the greatest, irreparable loss to be shut out from participation in that divine glory.

Let us consider and follow the example of Moses as described in Hebrews 11:24-26,

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. ²⁵He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. ²⁶He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. (Heb. 11:24-26)

If you have 20/20 spiritual vision, you will recognize the centrality of the cross in the Christian life. What it means to take up our cross and follow Christ is that Christ's will takes priority over our own will; where the two are in conflict, our own will must be sacrificed in favor of His will. A striking example of discipleship is seen in the life of Mildred Cable.

Mildred grew up in Great Britain and fell in love with a man who felt that the LORD had called him to be a pastor in that country. Mildred was convinced that the LORD wanted her to serve as a missionary in China. When the man asked her to marry him, she faced an agonizing decision. One night after much praying, talking, and weeping, she told him that she could not accept his proposal. With heavy hearts they said goodbye and went their separate ways. That night Mildred died to her own desires, her own hopes, her own ... dreams. She died to her own will to carry out the will of God. (*Our Daily Bread*, 8/15/93)

III. If You have 20/20 Spiritual Vision, You Must Thank God for It (Mk. 8:22-26; Matt. 16:17)

Notice how the miracle recorded in Mark 8:22-26 serves as an illustration of the teaching contained in the passage that follows. Rather than merely touching the blind man, Jesus took him by the hand and led him out of the village; not to gain privacy, but rather to call public attention to this miracle. Jesus goes through the elaborate procedure of spitting on the man's eyes and laying His hands on him. The miracle is performed in two stages: physical sight is granted to the man, then he is given comprehension and understanding. The message Jesus is conveying by means of this elaborately performed miracle is this: spiritual sight and comprehension are divine gifts from God and can only be bestowed by Christ and His Holy Spirit.

Note that in Matthew 16:17, in response to Peter's confession, Jesus declares, *"Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven."* Luke 9:18 informs us that this whole incident was preceded by a time of prayer; at which time, no doubt, Jesus asked the Father to reveal His true identity to His disciples, note Matthew 11:25-27,

At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. ²⁶Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. ²⁷All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." (Matt. 11:25-27)

Scripture speaks about the obstacles—which are humanly insurmountable—that keep a man from coming to Christ. For one thing, there is a demonic blinding:

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴The god of this age [a reference to the devil] has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Cor. 4:3-4)

Then there is the natural resistance of sinful man to the light of God, because of the conviction of sin:

... this is the reason for the condemnation: the Light has come into the world, but men loved the darkness rather than the light; because their works were evil. ²⁰Everyone who does evil hates the light and does not come to the light, so that his works will not be exposed. (Jn. 3:19-20)

In John 6:44 the Lord Jesus declares, *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him."* That is to say, no one by himself is able to overcome the obstacles cited above. Our own sinful human nature will prevent us from coming to Christ, and the devil will do all he can to see to it that we do not come.

If you have 20/20 spiritual vision and act upon it by confessing Christ as Savior and Lord, you must thank God for it. As the Apostle Paul informs the Corinthians, *"no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit"* (1 Cor. 12:3b.)

Conclusion

Our friend, Buddy, may be physically blind, but he is blessed with very good spiritual vision. He is able to see that Jesus is the Lord of glory who is worthy of our worship and adoration. He is able to see that Jesus is worthy of our devotion and rightfully requires first priority in our lives.

How is your spiritual vision? Are you able to see the centrality of the cross in Jesus' saving ministry? Are you able to acknowledge the centrality of the cross in the Christian life? If you have such spiritual perception, you must give thanks to God for it.

Appendix: The Text of Matthew 16:13-28

16¹³Now when Jesus came into the regions of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, Who do men say that the Son of man is? ¹⁴And they said, Some say, John the Baptist; some say, Elijah; and [still] others say, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. ¹⁵He asked them, But who do you say that I am? ¹⁶Simon Peter answered and said, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. ¹⁷Then Jesus answered and said to him, Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah; for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, [it has been revealed by] my Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸And I also tell you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not stand against it. ¹⁹I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you shall release on earth shall be released in heaven. ²⁰Then he charged the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.

²¹From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised up [from the dead]. ²²Then Peter took him [aside] and began to rebuke him, saying, May this be far from you, Lord; may this never happen to you. ²³But he turned and said to Peter, Get behind me, Satan; you are impediment to me, for your mind is not focused on the things of God, but on the things of men.

²⁴Then Jesus said to his disciples, If any man desires to be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. ²⁵Whoever wants to save his life, shall lose it; but whoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it. ²⁶What profit shall it be to a man if he shall gain the whole world, but forfeit his life? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his life? ²⁷The Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall he render to every man what his deeds deserve. ²⁸I tell you the truth, some of them who are standing here shall by no means taste of death until they have seen the Son of man coming in his kingdom. (Matt. 16:13-28)