

May 29, 2011

The Opening Eye

Mark 8:22-26

INTRODUCTION

In an essay that C. S. Lewis' wrote called *The Seeing Eye* he reflects on the news that the Soviets had just announced that they had sent astronauts into space but could not find God. Lewis compares this to complaining that you can't find Shakespeare in one of his plays:

If there were an idiot who thought plays existed on their own, without an author, our belief in Shakespeare would not be much affected by his saying, quite truly, that he had studied all the plays and never found Shakespeare in them...Even he has in reality been in some way affected by Shakespeare, but without knowing it. He lacked the necessary apparatus for detecting Shakespeare. Now of course this is only an analogy. I am not suggesting at all that the existence of God is as easily established as the existence of Shakespeare. My point is that, if God does exist, He is related to the universe more as an author is related to a play than as one object in the universe is related to another.¹

Now the "apparatus" to which Lewis referred to is like an eye: very much like the eye that we are going to look at today. But it's not exactly the same thing as the physical eye that rests in your head anymore than the mind is exactly the same thing as the mass of tissue called the brain that rests in your head. But we are going to have to "look at that" (hint) in this passage today. There is an eye that is bigger than world, because it was meant to behold the Maker of the world. But something has happened to this eye that we call blindness.

- THE OPTOMETRY OF GOD
- THE OPTICS OF FAITH

The Big Idea is that Christ alone opens our eyes, and this eye is always for seeing more.

Today there is a mad revolt against 'seeing' and claiming 'to see.' Even conservative theologians have jumped on the postmodern bandwagon in attacking reason and thinking

¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Seeing Eye* (Ballantine Books, New York 1992, fp. 1967); pp. 226-227

and seeing reality objectively. One such theologian says that the ‘sight’ and ‘light’ metaphors in Scripture are not to be used to express how we come to know God.²

Jesus disagrees. He says to us that,

The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! [Mat. 6:22-23]

DOCTRINE

I. THE OPTOMETRY OF GOD

A) Spiritual Blindness is Blind to Christ

1. *And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him (22).* Here are those good friends again. Like the friends who lowered the paralytic through Peter’s roof or the friends who brought the deaf man to Jesus, these men knew that something was wrong with being blind. Paul describes the deeper seeing problem in this way: “the god of this world has **blinded the minds** of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake” [2 Cor. 4:4-5]. Notice that our minds are referred to as “blind” by Scripture; so that our minds are supposed to be “seeing things.”

What we were born to see is God, and so naturally God is going to be very concerned for opening eyes. This is who He is! If God does all He does to glorify himself, then the creature’s apparatus that sees says something great about Him: “the LORD opens the eyes of the blind” [Ps. 146:8]. Sight exists because something infinitely worth looking at exists! And therefore God hates it that someone can’t see! This is the good news, that He came to “proclaim...the recovering of sight to the blind” [Lk. 4:18]. Now, it’s going to be crucial to see here that Jesus performs this healing of blindness right before He reveals his Person and Work more clearly than He had previously in his ministry. But the first thing we’ve got to see about what God is like is He is like this—He’s an eye-opener!

And I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know, in paths that they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I do, and I do not forsake them [Is. 42:16].

² cf. Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 2011); pp.

You want to be like Jesus? Then turn on the lights for the blind. Running out of juice? Then come and get some more light in classes and small groups and other studies.

2. *And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village (23a)*. The village in view here is Bethsaida (v. 22), which was under judgment for **spiritual blindness**: “Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you” [Mat. 11:21-22]. The Lord would not reveal His secret—His miracle cure for blindness—to those who did not passionately seek it.

B) Spiritual Enlightening Precedes Spiritual Sight

1. Here again is the “anti-method-methodology” of Jesus: *and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, “Do you see anything?” (23b)*. This is no spit-and-dirt mixture; this is a direct loogie-projectile to the eye! It is this same Jesus who speaks to the church that doesn’t think it is blind, that I have “salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see” [Rev. 3:18]. This is something that Jesus has that we don’t have, something we need. We are “poor in sight” and Jesus is rich in light. He wants us to see that we can’t make ourselves see. And if we can remember what Paul said to the Corinthians, that, the god of this world has blinded the mind of unbelievers to keep them from seeing a light that he calls “the good news” of “the glory of Christ.” There is a good, saving light that we are blind to *until*, as Paul goes on to say, “God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” [2 Cor. 4:6].

2. Notice that there is a separation in time between the touch of Jesus and the perception of this man. When Jesus asks him how his sight is doing *he looked up and said, “I see men, but they look like trees, walking” (24)*. Now this couldn’t be any limitation on Jesus’ power—this is not the flickering of a divine power outage here—so clearly this is done on purpose. The question is “What for?” It was this period of confusion and passivity that was followed with Jesus laying *his hands on his eyes again; and he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly (25)*. But the upshot is that God’s work on the eye comes before the eye’s new operation—“Unless you are born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God” [Jn. 3:3].

II. THE OPTICS OF FAITH

A) Faith is Weak *yet* Progressive

1. So in looking at verse 24 again we see from the man's answer that the man who was totally blind was still 'seeing-impaired'—*he looked up and said, "I see men, but they look like trees, walking" (24)*. Sight is good; better sight is better. You see the point here is not how excellent of a theologian you were when Jesus saved you versus someone else. You and everyone else were equally blind. But don't get suckered into changing the subject. Where we want to look at other people's looking as an excuse not to look, Jesus says to the hard-of-looking, "look, you blind, that you may see!" [Is. 42:18]. Jesus is exactly the one thing that looking at is what gives the looking, and our looking is exactly what faith is. So **look!**

One commentator suggests that, starting with Jesus' question about whether or not the man saw anything, the design was, "that the Lord wants this individual to become 'involved' in his own cure, step by step."³ Why? Because sight is for seeing! Something of the way things were supposed to be from the beginning was being put back in place.

2. *Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly (25)*. Faith is passive and faith is active. It is passive because it watches the Savior save us. It does not save itself. But it is active because it does something. It believes, trusts, lays hold of this salvation.

But here we see not just a 'seeing eye,' but an opening eye: an ever-increasing sight. This sight expands from fuzzy individual things—like men looking like trees—to the big picture, which is why we have a Big Idea in our sermons, and its why we memorize Scripture verses, and why we try to remember what we've seen in the Word today when we open it again tomorrow. We do not just hear God's Word (as if it is nothing but sound-waves). The hearing shapes our vision. It's not like our souls are shaped like ears and eyes. Those are faints shadows for a hearing-seeing-thinking thing. Paul tells us that "we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal" [2 Cor. 4:18].

B) Faith is for Seeing Eternity

1. *Everything clearly! (25b)*. Does Mark really mean to say "everything"? Well, not literally about what this man physically saw. It just meant "everything" in a normal field of vision. But it is a picture of the seeing that Paul said God shows in our hearts when He

³ Hendriksen, p. 322

communicates Christ to us. Ravi Zacharias said that “God is like the sun. You cannot look directly at him, but without him you cannot see anything else for what it is.”⁴ Christ is the glory of God that you can see: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and **we have seen** his glory...**No one has ever seen** God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, *he has made him known*” [Jn. 1:14, 18]. Jesus is the Image of God that you can see, because He gives you the right apparatus for this kind of seeing; and when the Son opens these eyes it is like the rising of the sun in the morning and you can see the whole world for what it is: “But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day” [Prov. 4:18], and Paul tells us that, “The spiritual person judges all things” [1 Cor. 2:15].

What if Jesus had responded, “Men like trees walking? Good enough.” Or, what if one of the disciples grabbed Jesus’ hand after the first time and said, “C’mon Jesus that’s good enough, we are men after all, and I can see how we look like tall trees from his perspective. Why do you have to be so judgmental about his perspective?” Being spiritually nearsighted is natural, but it’s not where a real Christian is comfortable staying. If you have an allergic reaction to talking about the essence of things, then you don’t want to see everything for what it is. If all you want is “just the facts” about this or that practical thing, you are a manipulator of what you see.

2. Revelation is intentionally gradual. He touches us again. He invades our ignorant world and if we are truly from his world, we are glad that He does. As Aslan said to the cabbie in *The Magician’s Nephew*, “You know me better than you think you know, and you shall come to know me better yet.” This hope of seeing God characterizes the true Christian: “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known” [1 Cor. 13:12].

3. Those who don’t like to see don’t get to see. Again with the village: *And he sent him to his home, saying, “Do not even enter the village” (26)*. Those who don’t like to see don’t get to see. You say, “What are you talking about—none of us wanted to see!” That’s right—aren’t you glad He set aside that rule by showing mercy on you?

APPLICATION

⁴ Ravi Zacharias, *Can Man Live Without God?*

I only have one application. Are you thankful to God for him showing you what is true and real? Is this thankfulness evidenced by a desire to open your eyes more, to focus them more on this same light that opened them to begin with? What could have been more ungrateful of an act toward Jesus for this formerly blind man, at this moment, than to close his eyes? Do you shudder and wince and close your eyes to any part of the truth of God in Scripture? *Why?*

It is good news that Jesus gives you eyes to see, and the thing He wants you to see is Him:

“Look to Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith” [Heb. 12:2].