

DO YOU SEE ANYTHING?

A few years ago I went to Israel for a conference. I had a day off and wanted to get out and see the sights but I had very little money and did not know how to go about booking a bus tour. I figured I would just go down and sit at the front desk of the hotel and wait for one of the many church tour groups who were in Israel at the time and ask if I could tag along. I had heard that there was a large group from a Southern Baptist church that was at the hotel. Sure enough a blond American woman with a Southern accent came down to the desk and I overheard that their tour group was going to the Dead Sea and Masada that day. I introduced myself, saying I was a pastor from a church in Kuwait and asked, if they had room, could I tag along with their group. She went and asked the tour leader and came back saying that they would love to have me join them. I boarded the bus full of anticipation. They asked an older elder from their church to say a prayer before we left. "What a wonderful old saint" I remember thinking. I was excited to be getting out to see the sites.

The bus had left Jerusalem and was near Jerico when the woman I had met at the front desk asked me about the church I was pastoring. She said "I didn't know that WE had a church in Kuwait". That word WE struck me as unusual. Then she asked what year I had graduated from Brigham Young University. Suddenly it dawned on me – I was on a tour with Mormons! What I thought was one thing ended up being something quite different.

Sometimes life is like that. We go along life's road thinking we see everything perfectly only to realize later that our understanding of the world around us was actually very wrong.

When contact lenses were still a novelty, a woman was pulled over by the police. Checking the motorist's license, the policeman noted, "It says you're required to wear glasses." "It's OK officer, I have contacts," the driver explained. "I don't care who you know," the officer growled. "You still have to wear your glasses."

How good is your vision? In physical terms this is an easy thing to find out - in spiritual terms it is not always so easy. Vision is sometimes a subjective thing. When I was in first year University I thought my vision was fine. I had not been for an eye test since I had received my driver's license years before. I was driving one day and realized I was having trouble reading the signs far ahead. I got my first pair of glasses and only then did I understand everything I had been missing. Sometimes we are like that in our spiritual journey. We think our vision is fine until God reveals something to us and shows us what true clarity is like. How well do you see and understand Christ this morning?

Mark 8:22 They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. 23 He 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?" 24 He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around." 25 Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. 26 Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't go into the village." 27 Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?" 28 They 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."

The background to this story is important. Jesus has just fed the 4000. When they leave He warns the disciples against the “yeast” of the Pharisees but the disciples don’t understand what Jesus is saying. Jesus asks them about the feeding of the 5000 and 4000 and asks the question, "Do you still not see or understand... Do you have eyes but fail to see...?" (Mark 8:17-18). The issue seems to be about clarity. The disciples saw in part, but they had not yet grasped the full truth.

1. Seeing in Part - (22-24)

In this story, Jesus touches the man's eyes and asks if he saw *EI TIS* which in Greek means ANYTHING. In other cases Jesus simply spoke as with Bartimaeus and there was instant healing (Luke 18:35-43). With the man born blind in John 8:6 Jesus used spit mixed with dirt as mud and after the man washes in the pool he could see perfectly. This is the only story in which there is partial healing. Certainly Jesus had the power to heal the man completely, but there was a lesson to be learned - a case study for the disciples?

Why did Jesus ask if the man saw "anything"? Why did He not simply say "can you see". The emphasis was not *if* he had sight but *what* he was able to see. After touching him the man receives his sight partially and responds that he can see people, but they looked like trees walking around. Let me ask you a simple question, at this point does the man have sight or not? Can he see? You can answer this question in two ways:

a. YES – he saw something

In a way this man had already received his sight. He was able to see people. Before there was absolutely nothing but darkness. Now he is able to see people.

The blind man was brought to Jesus and begged for Jesus to touch him. The condition of the man was grave. Imagine living your life completely blind! Then you are told that there is hope of having sight again. The man is desperate for healing. Jesus touches him and finally he can see something. Put yourself in his place. He is better off than before - now he has sight. Don't you think there was the temptation to take what he could get and run? He could have settled for second best - partial sight.

I am sure you have watched one of those game shows on TV where the person wins something and is then tempted to trade it in for something else behind door number 2. Maybe this man felt a little like that. He was better off than before so he should quit while he was ahead.

The disciples were like that. Remember that Jesus has been talking with His disciples about "clarity". They saw in part, but not in full. They knew some of the truth, but not the FULL truth. The disciples were soon to see this as well. In the next lines we read that Jesus asked His disciples “who do people say I am?” The disciples told Jesus what they had heard "some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." The crowds heard the teaching and saw the works of Jesus but they were still confused about who He was. They saw in part, but not in full.

Like the disciples the church is filled today with people who see only part of the whole. They are attracted to Christ for many reasons (healing from damaged emotions, intellectual assent of truth, traditional feelings) and they obtain sight. But just accepting Christ is only the first step.

Martin Lloyd Jones described these people as, "They seem to know enough about Christianity to spoil their enjoyment of the world, and yet they do not know enough to feel happy about themselves... they see, and yet they do not see".

"Millions of Christians live in a sentimental haze of vague piety, with soft organ music trembling in the lovely light from stained-glass windows. Their religion is a pleasant thing of emotional quiver, divorced from the intellect, divorced from the will, and demanding little except lip service to a few harmless platitudes. I suspect that Satan has called off his attempt to convert people to agnosticism. After all, if a person travels far enough away from Christianity, he or she is always in danger of seeing it in perspective and deciding that it is true. It is much safer, from Satan's point of view, to vaccinate a person with a mild case of Christianity so as to protect him from the real disease." -- Howard Hendricks

Yes they see, but only in part. Perhaps this is because it is only part of them that sees - only their mind or emotions or will. They see that Christ is Lord, that salvation is offered, that hope is available - but only that. Is this true sight?

A man from Colorado moved to Texas and built a house with a large picture window from which he could view hundreds of miles of rangeland. "The only problem is," he said, "there's nothing to see." About the same time, a man from Texas moved to Colorado and built a house with a large picture window overlooking the Rockies. "The only problem is I can't see anything," he said. "The mountains are in the way."

How about you? How good is your sight? Maybe you know the truth. You have even accepted Christ into your life. That is not the end, only the beginning. There is much more!

b. No – what he saw was inaccurate

While he could see something, what he saw was inaccurate. The men looked like trees, not men! This is not true sight. Yes the man could see. There was so much he was missing. Instead of just settling for second best the man tells Jesus what he sees. He was honest of his condition. The man was not satisfied with what he had - he knew there was more.

If Jesus were to ask you "do you see anything" how would you respond. Be honest of your condition. Do you feel there is something in the Christian life that you are missing out on. Is it only a mental accent of truth, or an emotional response to help or perhaps only a decision or act of will without substance. Do you want more... the first step is recognizing your need.

John Wesley was a religious man. He was highly educated, being trained at prestigious Oxford University and was ordained as an Anglican priest in 1725 at his father's insistence. Being an Anglican priest in those days meant you would read the entire Bible in a year including 5 psalms a day, every day. Their prayer life was structured around some of the greatest Christian thought every recorded. John Wesley had certainly heard about Jesus.

In 1729 John and his brother Charles founded the "Holy Club" which trained young people in rigorous spiritual disciplines. They visited the sick, prisoners and poor. They held Bible Studies and prayer meetings which was the foundation of Methodist church. Wesley, in his Anglican way, was committed

to winning the lost. He was as evangelistically minded as any evangelical Christian today. In 1735 he traveled to North America, to the newly founded colony of Georgia, with the express purpose of converting the Native Indians to Christ. After not seeing any results in his ministry he decided to return to England.

While on the ship crossing the Atlantic a terrible storm came that threatened the safety of everyone on board. Wesley was terrified that he might die. He went to his cabin in terror of death, with no peace in his soul. Then he heard singing in one of the cabins. He went and found some Moravian brethren singing hymns to God in the midst of the storm. He asked them why they were not afraid for their lives. They told him that God was overseeing their lives and if they lived or died, they would be in the hands of God. They had the assurance that the Spirit of God had given them a new birth into heaven's life and they had no fear of death. Jesus was their Lord. That experience moved Wesley and caused him to question his own convictions.

Later, he met Peter Bohler, a Moravian believer, who told him he needed to be born again, to receive the Spirit of Christ in his life. And when Wesley was thirty five years old, on May 24, 1738, he was in Aldersgate and heard a reading of Luther's preface to the book of Romans. While he was sitting there he felt his heart strangely warmed, and in a flash realized that God had given him his Holy Spirit. He had studied Christian faith all his life. He had read the Bible, the early church fathers, Luther and Calvin. He had been ordained and gone to the mission field and all that time, he did not have an experience of Jesus in his life! After that Aldersgate experience the churches of England and Scotland were changed.

2. Seeing in Full - (25-26)

Jesus continues the process and the man's sight is completely restored (25). He then was able to see everything "clearly". A little while later Jesus pushed His disciples to clarity. He asked the most important question that any person will ever be asked, "What about you? Who do you say I am?"

All of us in life have to, at some point, answer this question. Who is Jesus? One day we will stand in heaven and before God and answer this question. Peter got it right. In a moment of clarity he answered, "You are the Christ". I am sure he did not understand completely at that moment what exactly that meant. It was not until the crucifixion the resurrection that they would clearly understand.

An optometrist who placed a patient in front of an eye chart and said, "Cover your right eye with your hand." The patient read the 20/20 line perfectly. "Now your left." Again, a flawless read. "Now both," requested the doctor. There was silence. The patient couldn't even read the large E on the top line. Mystified, the doctor turned and discovered that the patient had done exactly what he had been told; he was standing there with both his eyes covered.

Let me give you an eye test. Instead of putting your hand over one eye and reading a letter on a chart, put your hand on your heart and read these words of Jesus;

Mark 12:30 "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. 31 The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

Matt 6:33 "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness..."

Let me go back to the story I started with. The moment I realized that I was on a bus with Mormons they realized that they had not invited a Mormon pastor but an evangelical missionary pastor to tag along with them on their tour of the Holy Land. We actually had a great day together. We floated in the Dead Sea. We saw the Qumran caves where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. We climbed Masada, the ancient Jewish fortress. As we were on our way back to the hotel the inevitable question was asked. A member of the team asked me “as an evangelical Christian, do you believe that I as a Mormon am going to heaven?”. Suddenly the bus grew very quiet. Forty people stopped what they were doing and turned for the answer.

I could have given the easy answer. I could have said “sure, everyone who believes in Jesus goes to heaven. You are a Mormon and I am a Christian – we both believe in Jesus right? There is no difference.” However, like Peter so many years before I heard the question behind the question. I heard Jesus asking me “who do YOU say I am.” I said something like this: “Mormons and Christians have a lot in common. The main difference between us is an understanding of who Jesus was. The bible says that Jesus is the only begotten son of God, the third member of the Trinity. I believe that Jesus died for my sins on a cross. I believe He rose again and is alive today. Jesus said, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’ Unless you accept Jesus as your savior, God incarnate who died for your sins, and receive the gift of salvation He offers there is no way to enter heaven.”

How about you? How is your spiritual vision today? Yes, you see something of who Jesus is but could it be that there is more that you may be missing? Could it be that you have settled for second best. I believe God is giving each of us the opportunity of seeing Him in a clearer way?

I remember the story of the men who came to Philip and said "we want to see Jesus." (John 12:21) I don't know about you but I would like to see more of Him today in my life. More revelation of His love, more of His power and presence in your life. Are you hungry for a deeper relationship with Him?

This was the Apostle Paul's prayer for all of us:

Eph 3:16-19 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge -- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

In Ontario a woman named Rose Crawford had been blind for 50 years. Surgery restored her vision. The amazing thing about the story, however, is that 20 years of her blindness had been unnecessary. She didn't know that surgical techniques had been developed, and that an operation could have restored her vision at the age of 30. Why did she continue to assume that her situation was hopeless? Had no one told her about the wonderful advances in eye surgery? If only they had ...

Can you imagine living blind for so many years when your eyes could have been restored. Think of all the wasted years. It is easy to become contented in blindness. It is also easy to become contented in a life that follows Jesus but only from a distance.