

Upside-Down World

Jesus once healed a blind man in two stages. First he put spit on his eyes, laid his hands on him and asked if he could see anything. The man gave a curious answer: *“I see men like trees, walking”*. So Jesus put his hands on his eyes again and this time the man’s sight was perfectly restored. You can read the full account of this miracle in Mark’s gospel, chapter 8, verses 22–26.

Why Two Stages?

Whatever Jesus did was significant. It certainly wasn’t the case that he was struggling to give this man sight, and only just managed it at the second attempt. Jesus did many miracles with apparent ease. Paralytics were told to walk and did so easily; deaf people had their hearing restored; sick people were immediately cured, as were epileptics and the mentally deranged. So why did the Lord cure this man in two stages, when he could have given him instant sight? It seems that he wanted to teach his disciples a lesson about their struggle to obtain spiritual insight.

Read the account in its setting in Mark chapter 8 and you will find it sandwiched between two episodes where the disciples were struggling to understand what Jesus was saying and who Jesus really was. He had cautioned them to *“Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod”*. He was warning about the dangerous teaching of two groups who were opposed to everything that Jesus said and did; but the mention of *“leaven”* had the disciples thinking about food instead.



Then, immediately after the account of the healing of the blind man, Jesus asked them *“Who do you say that I am?”* (Mark 8:29) and it was Peter who made a breakthrough in their understanding when he said *“You are the Christ”* (see also Matthew 16:13–20).

Misunderstanding

Perhaps you think that the twelve disciples, who spent years with Jesus, understood everything immediately and never had any difficulty with anything their Master said. But it wasn’t like that at all. They took a long time to understand that Jesus had come to save mankind from sin and death and that he was to sacrifice his life as part of God’s wonderful plan to rescue sinners.

Peter made his breakthrough statement, which Jesus said had been revealed to him by God, but when he began to teach them about his impending rejection, his death and his resurrection, Peter lapsed straight back to his previous confusion:

Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But when he had turned around and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, “Get behind

me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men (Mark 8:32–33).

Developing Insight

The disciples understood something about the work of Jesus, but couldn't see it clearly. Their insight was like the developing sight of the blind man – at stage one – and it was some considerable time before they came to appreciate what Jesus was all about. When he was arrested, tried and crucified, they were bereft. When the women came to say the grave was empty and the Lord was alive, they could not believe it. Only when the risen Jesus appeared to them did they begin to understand that everything that happened had been part of God's plan of salvation. Even then Thomas was unconvinced, as he said:

The other disciples ... said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe" (John 20:25).

Second Stage

Thomas came to believe when Jesus appeared to him as well, but it goes to show that it takes time to understand just what God is doing, as His great plan of redemption unfolds. The problem the disciples had was that they had a preconceived idea of what the Jewish Messiah would be like and his dying wasn't included in their scheme of things.

That understandable difficulty is a warning to all of us for we too can have religious ideas which don't match Bible teaching and they can prevent us from seeing things clearly.

That blind man needed his confused vision to be sorted out by Jesus. He could see, but his sight was badly impaired. The second time he got to see things as they really are. There were many people like him who saw Jesus in the flesh, but who didn't recognise him for what he really was – the Son of God. They were Bible readers but their understanding fell short, as Jesus said:

"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of me. But you are not willing to come to me that you may have life" (John 5:39–40).

"Come to me"

We don't want that to be said of us – that our understanding falls short of accepting Jesus as the God-provided Messiah, who came to give his life for each of us, and who will come again to complete the work of recovery and restitution, when he establishes God's kingdom on earth.

Today's world has got everything out of perspective. Mankind is glorified; human laws and justice systems ignore God's law and establish man-made morals and values in their place. Greed, exploitation, money, power and privilege are everything.

This world-system is about to be replaced by the Kingdom of God and the man who will rule the world is the one who can give sight to the blind and health and healing to mankind. He is the saviour the world needs and God will send him soon. Meanwhile we need to read about him, listen to his words, and come to him that we might have life.

Editor