

The Twelve | Enrolled in the School of Jesus Christ

Peter's Confession of Faith

Mark 8.16-33
2.24.19

They began to discuss with one another the fact that they had no bread.¹⁷ And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart?"¹⁸ "HAVING EYES, DO YOU NOT SEE? AND HAVING EARS, DO YOU NOT HEAR? And do you not remember,¹⁹ when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces you picked up?" They said to Him, "Twelve."²⁰ "When I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?" And they said to Him, "Seven."²¹ And He was saying to them, "Do you not yet understand?"

²² And they came to Bethsaida. And they brought a blind man to Jesus and implored Him to touch him.²³ Taking the blind man by the hand, He brought him out of the village; and after spitting on his eyes and laying His hands on him, He asked him, "Do you see anything?"

²⁴ And he looked up and said, "I see men, for I see them like trees, walking around."²⁵ Then again He laid His hands on his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored, and began to see everything clearly.²⁶ And He sent him to his home, saying, "Do not even enter the village."²⁷ Jesus went out, along with His disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way He questioned His disciples, saying to them, "Who do people say that I am?"²⁸ They told Him, saying, "John the Baptist; and others say Elijah; but others, one of the prophets."²⁹ And He continued by questioning them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ."³⁰ And He warned them to tell no one about Him.³¹ And 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.³² And He was stating the matter plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him.³³ But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

We've been looking at the method Jesus Christ used to launch His movement. E.M Bounds famously said that men look for better methods but Jesus Christ looked for better men – men WERE His method.

People were His plan; He chose and called people and then He remade them to be followers and leaders. And we've been looking at how He trained the Twelve. He finds this diverse group full of hang-ups and prejudices and ambitions and He concentrates on them... He brings them along. He sees the angel in the block of marble (Michelangelo) and He keeps carving until He sets the angel free... He sculpted them.

Today's text is the Great Divide, the hinge in the first three Gospels. Here Jesus Christ asks His twelve disciples about public opinion (objective question) "Who do people say that I am?" and then He asks their opinion (subjective question) – "...who do YOU SAY that I am?"

Once they answer this question correctly THEN the Rabbi shifts gears and moves on to the NEXT unit in their training – an even more difficult lesson – "what do you think I've come to DO?"

It's a beautiful study in how Jesus Christ brings His disciples to faith... and if you know anything about Christianity, you know that FAITH extremely important. Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb 11.6; Rom 14.23) – it's the way people come to know God and the way people receive life and forgiveness from Him.

YOU may wish you had faith... you may think that your educated, scientific mind is getting in the way of faith. Or you may think that IF you had proof THEN you could believe (and have faith) ... So what IS faith and how does it come about...how do we get it/grow it?

So let's see what Jesus Christ does to 1) Plant Faith 2) Cultivate/Develop Faith and 3) Complete Faith

Jesus sees the WEEDS of UNBELIEF in the religious leaders of that day, people jaded and deeply cynical and CLOSED TO ANY POSSIBILITY that they themselves may be wrong. They would ask Him for a sign...and another and another and they would never conclude anything...would never see the sign-if-i-cance of the signs and never believe.

But also in the disciples themselves – they'd just seen Him multiply bread and feed thousands of people and they were already fretting about where they'd get their next meal – the Bread of Life was in the boat with them but their hearts weren't trusting.

And sometimes Jesus Christ does find faith in the most unlikely of characters, gentiles and sinners.

Faith is not so much a decision you can make or like a resolution or a "new leaf." It's more like a dawning. One way to think about unbelief (the opposite of faith) is that it's like a disability from which a person cannot heal himself.

One mysterious truth about unbelief and faith is that we are BOTH responsible for our unbelief (v. 17 "Do you have a hardened heart?" – it's willful!). But we're ALSO powerless over it... We can't make ourselves believe. Faith has to be planted in us from outside.

Looking at the disciples He says, "Having eyes do you not see? And having ears do you not hear and do you not remember?" He describes unbelief as an incurable disability, like memory-loss: "Do you not remember?"; like deafness, like incurable blindness.

And then immediately, in the next scene, Jesus heals incurable blindness. He just compared the disciples' unbelief to blindness and then He highlights the parallel between physical blindness and spiritual blindness – we're powerless over BOTH.

The crowd at Bethsaida brings a man helpless, unable to bring himself, blind - unable to find his way - a vivid picture of inability. His problem is real. It's not a cop-out, not a ploy, not a lack of willpower - he can't see. You'd never get angry with a person like this; he'd say, "I can't."

Just as it's futile to scold or command or cajole or badger a person who doesn't believe and the unbeliever would be correct to say, "I can't."

I realize that raises serious philosophical questions. This passage doesn't stop to answer them (they're addressed to some degree in other parts of the Bible). The focus here is simply on the fact that Jesus ends the man's blindness and in doing so He simultaneously ends the spiritual blindness and the unbelief of Peter and the disciples. And faith is PLANTED.

As powerless as the man was to end his blindness, so powerless were they to end their unbelief. But Jesus the Rabbi shows that He can open eyes to see AND only He can open hearts to believe.

Now what do WE do with that? There's a mystery in it... we can't help our unbelief (in that sense it's like an incurable ailment) and yet we are also responsible for it (in that sense it's like a fault or like a sin)? How should we respond to that mystery?

Well, this episode shows that on your own you can draw certain conclusions about Jesus Christ, like the crowds. You can conclude certain things intellectually, volitionally; in much the same way you could decide to start working out; or you could conclude that the earth is a sphere or you could decide to start saving money; or choose where to live or commit to stop being late for work or school. But being a Christian isn't exactly like any of these things.

It's actually more like being healed of an incurable disease over which you yourself are powerless. And I don't mean to suggest that there AREN'T decisions in the Christian life. Just that, deeper than a decision (John 1.12-13), deeper than the will...all of us are blind, are bound...unable...until Jesus liberates to believe. It's not to say that believing is irrational – there were evidences and signs but something MORE than logic/willpower is at work in the origin of faith.

These unbelieving disciples can't put it together (v.21 "Do you not understand?"), but Jesus kept rousing their hearts with His trustworthiness and when Peter finally saw it/said it, Matthew's version, includes Jesus Christ's words to Peter, "Blessed are you Simon, son of Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you but My Father who is in Heaven." Peter couldn't "do

the math" on his own. It wasn't simply a decision. It was a healing...a revelation. Faith had to be planted.

One practical consequence of this is gratitude. If you believe, it's NOT because you're smarter or faster or more spiritual; it's because you've been liberated and given eyes to see God's grace in Jesus Christ. So be grateful and rejoice. Another upshot is real sympathy toward those who don't believe and a complete absence of any self-righteousness or sense of your own superiority. We didn't fix our unbelief – it required supernatural intervention.

And for those who DON'T YET believe... are you maybe unwittingly... beginning to believe? Maybe faith has been planted in you... and you're beginning to be aware of it because this Person, Jesus Christ is starting to attract your attention...you feel drawn. That's how it starts.

All right, first the planting of the seed of faith; something real and vital and supernatural has taken place in the disciples. God liberated them and they have believed but still, it was an embryonic, undeveloped kind of faith.

A huge conclusion is reached: "You are the Christ!", the turning point of the whole book - God opened their hearts to believe. But the immaturity of this faith is immediately exposed. They do believe (more than just knowing); they believe Jesus is the Christ, but they don't know what that word "Christ" means!

In the same way this helpless blind man now sees...He sees but doesn't really SEE. So THEY see that Jesus is the Christ but they don't see what a Christ is! It's a naïve and raw kind of faith.

The half-healed blurry vision man is a picture of the disciples. It's the only time this happens and evidently the writer Mark is showing us, "This is how it is for the disciples...and MAYBE also for YOU, O reader!"

Jesus gives the man opportunity to express an honest kind of dissatisfaction, which was pretty amazing. If Jesus Christ did some work for you and then asked, "How's that?... Do you approve?" Would you say, "Well, I know You're the Creator of the universe and all but...the picture quality is ...uh..."

I might just "quit while I'm ahead." But this man, used to being helpless, he's somehow bold enough to say (like Oliver Twist), "Please sir, I want some more."

And Jesus is furious, "More?! How dare you?!"

NO! It's just the opposite. He brings the desperation to the surface and then Jesus is attracted to that desperation; He moves toward it!

And Jesus is saying to those disciples, "This is how you guys are...in a minute you'll believe (say "Thou art the Christ!") but your sight will be so cloudy (like seeing men walking like trees) but if you come to Me and if you have that holy audacity to say, "Please sir! I want some more!" I will move toward you and I will give you clarity and will grow up and clarify your faith."

I wonder if while He was healing this man He was looking at the disciples with a look that said, "See! When he asked, I made HIM see clearly. I did it for him. I'll do it for you!... Just ask. That's really what faith IS – it's depending on ME "

Maybe, they were so self-assured that THEY had figured it all OUT...and they KNOW exactly what a Christ IS and THEY know what the good life IS and what spirituality IS... Maybe they were just afraid that Jesus couldn't be trusted... but NONE of them was inclined to ask, "Lord, I'm not sure I see clearly!"

Peter speaks up: "I may not know everything about what a Christ IS but I know this: YOU ARE NOT GOING TO JERUSALEM to be rejected and killed!"

And Jesus calls him the devil! Peter's view of what a Messiah does is opposite of God's view...

And Jesus is saying, "You see but YOU don't SEE! Why not learn from the half-healed blind man...learn to say, 'I'm not there yet!' Because lesson #2 is that I have come NOT to clean up the government in Jerusalem or Rome or Washington DC...I have not come to make life NICE for you... I've come to satisfy the justice of God for YOU...and for everyone who believes until the end of time."

"I've come to do more than you could imagine... to live IN OBEDIENCE to My Father's Law (like no one ever lived) and to die as if I were the ultimate Law Breaker and to DO THAT FOR YOU."

"When you see it happen, you'll be appalled... when you hear that I was betrayed and beaten and ridiculed and showered in spit...you'll be shattered ...UNLESS...that is...unless you get this NEXT LESSON and the only way you'll get it...is to ask Me."

See? We're just like they were. Do you want to mature faith... to receive from God all that He has for you? All you have to do is ask...it's coming again to Jesus.

Are you ready to say to Jesus Christ, "Lord, I see but I don't see? My faith is weak and immature...I'm naïve and silly... My view of Your kingdom is hopelessly tangled up in my understanding of the American Dream (just like those disciples view was tangled up in THEIR own cultural trappings of the good life.)"

Are you willing to see how your own hypersensitivity to criticism, for instance, may just be a sign that you're not trusting the One who TOOK all your criticism and buried it in a tomb? Are you willing to say, "Lord, I see – but I don't see"?

Can you say, "the way I fret over finances and the great struggle I have with generosity shows that IN this area I have a VERY LITTLE Christ – I see but I don't see!"

If you say to this One you call the Christ, if you say to Him, "Lord, help me – I want some more!" Do you think He'll yell at you?

And if He shows you what He's really all about and it leads you to make changes in your life – do you think those changes will mess up YOUR life?

Then you really DON'T see... I mean you may SEE... but you don't SEE.

Good news is...all you have to do...is tell Him...now and again...and again and again... "Please Lord, I see, but I don't see...Please Lord, I want some MORE" ...and He is delighted to clarify your vision and give and give and give.