

SEEN TO UNSEEN

INTRODUCTION

Do some brief research and tell the story of Zacharias Jansen's invention of the microscope (1590s). Prior to the invention of this profound but simple device, the microscope, scientists believed some things about the human body that seem silly to us. Their diagnoses, practices, and cures were primitive and sometimes frightening. But the invention of the microscope brought new possibilities, because it revealed previously unseen realities. The human body at the cellular level, the one that we can't see, is very different but not completely removed from the physical body we can see. All the microscope did was allow us to see it.

The shift from Seen to Unseen is like this. It allows us to see things in the spiritual realm that have always been there; they are just as real as things in the visible world, and even responsible for the condition of the visible world, but remain invisible to those who cannot see.

TEXTUAL WORK: I WANT TO SEE

Returning to our story of the disciples following Jesus along the way, we are told of the time they entered Jericho (Mark 10:46–52) right after one of their arguments about who was greatest (vv. 37, 43). Alongside the road was a blind man named Bartimaeus who cried out, “Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!” (vv. 46–47). When Jesus heard him, he called Bartimaeus over and asked the same question he asked the disciples earlier: “What do you want me to do for you?” (v. 51, see v. 36). The blind man's answer was very different: “Rabbi, I want to see!” (v. 51). In that moment, Jesus healed him and “immediately he received his sight and *followed Jesus along the road*” (v. 52, emphasis added).

In the New Testament, blindness is a powerful metaphor for what is wrong with us in our natural state. The healing of blindness is a metaphor for what God is trying to do in salvation.

Note: Isaiah's powerful use of this metaphor in Isaiah 29:18; 42:6–7; 61:1. In the Gospels, blindness is never just physical, but spiritual as well.

Earlier, Jesus had asked the disciples, “Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? . . . Do you still not understand?” (Mark 8:18, 21). Immediately following that conversation, he healed a blind man while his disciples continued to commit one blunder after another (vv. 22–26). So by the time Bartimaeus was healed of his blindness and joined Jesus on the way, there were the disciples who had followed Jesus for two years, but were still blind; and there was Bartimaeus, who had followed Jesus only a few minutes but could see clearly.

The shift from Seen to Unseen is like being healed of blindness to things that are eternal. It goes beyond believing in things you can't see to seeing things *because* you believe in them. Most Christians say they believe in things they can't see, but this is like a blind man saying he believes in the world around him, even though he remains blind. Instead, when we are cured of spiritual blindness, we “fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen” (2 Cor. 4:18). God awakens our faculties for discerning his activity in this world, and we see his fingerprints everywhere. Paul prayed “that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you” (Eph. 1:18).

God has given us two sets of eyes—one on our face to see what is happening in the visible world, and the other in our hearts to see what is happening in the invisible world. Opening the other eye never changes anything in the visible world, but it explains and reveals a completely different set of realities that can teach us how to live in the visible world. Illustration: story of Elisha and the servant (see *SoulShift*, pp. 63–65).

We need to pray as Bartimaeus did, “Jesus, son of David . . . I want to see!”

IMPLICATIONS: WHEN WE ARE HEALED OF OUR BLINDNESS

It Causes a Sudden Shift in Our Values

We begin to assign to things the importance they have in reality. Things of the Spirit are the most essential in the world, not hobbies.

Right next to our heads is a world where the poor in spirit own the kingdom of God and the meek inherit the earth, the poor are rich, and the rich go away empty. When we see what is unseen, we do not just wait for heaven to come; we notice the ideals of heaven and value them.

We Discover That We Are Never Alone

Like disciples walking next to Jesus on the road to Emmaus, when our eyes are opened, we recognize Jesus in the mundane places of life, and our hearts burn within us.

A reporter asked G. K. Chesterton, “If the risen Christ suddenly appeared at this very moment and stood behind you, what would you do?” Chesterton said, “He is!”

APPLICATION: MOVING FROM SEEN TO UNSEEN

Pray “Jesus, son of David . . . I want to see!” daily and before every meeting, service, and appointment in your week.

Learn new ways to talk about ordinary things. Instead of saying something happened, say “the Lord allowed.” Instead of telling what you received, share how “God provided.” Speaking of the world in physical terms (whether scientific or humanistic language) is only one way of describing what happens. Begin to practice using other language.

CONCLUSION

May God continue to open our eyes. May he help us develop our faculties for seeing the unseen. Like the servant of Elisha, may God open our eyes to see that the hills are on fire with

the presence of God. Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we have been kept from seeing the reality of another world. May Christ open our eyes today. May we begin to see here on earth what everyone will see in heaven. Let's pray for that together.