

SEEING PEOPLE THROUGH CHRIST'S EYES
Faith in Action #2

LUKE 4:14-21

Welcome to the second week of our all church emphasis called Faith in Action! As followers of Jesus, we want our lives to be less about just *going* to church and more about *being* the church. An important part of being the church is becoming increasingly outwardly focused – seeing people the way Jesus saw people. There are a lot of eye issues out there that can affect the way you see – or don't see – things literally. For example, there's something called **amblyopia** – more commonly known as “Lazy Eye.” Anybody out there with that condition? There's **color blindness** which is the inability to distinguish between some colors. Anyone? Some folk suffer from **dry eye syndrome** which is an inability to produce tears. Then there's **hyperopia** or farsightedness. That simply means an inability to see near objects clearly. Hyperopia, anyone? The opposite is **myopia** or nearsightedness. That's the inability to see distant objects clearly. That's one of my personal eye issues. There's even something called **presbyopia** which means seeing things like a Presbyterian! No, seriously, it's Greek for “Elder Eye” which means a difficulty seeing close-up for those in their 40s and older. I have that issue, too. Then there's **strabismus** which means eyes that are misaligned. Some of you recognize this guy – actor Marty Feldman – who apparently suffered from strabismus.

Most of us suffer from some kind of physical vision problem and an even higher percentage of us suffer from spiritual vision problems. For instance, some people have Spiritual Lazy Eye. We may see a problem or see someone with a need and do precisely nothing. Others have Spiritual Color Blindness. We may just not pay as much attention to the plight and problems of some people because of their race. There's been lots of discussion about why the suffering of people in Africa isn't given as much priority as in other parts of the world. Is it a matter of skin color? Some of us may suffer from Spiritual Dry Eye Syndrome. We lack compassion. We don't “cry” or feel much of anything for people who are hurting. A person can have Spiritual Farsightedness. We love to give to overseas mission efforts but don't see the pain in our local community. Or a person can have the opposite condition of Spiritual Nearsightedness. We love local mission opportunities but are blind to the extreme needs of others across the ocean. Maybe a few of us struggle with Spiritual Presbyopia. In other words, our compassion for people may have grown weak as we grow older. I would guess the vast majority of us struggle with some level of Spiritual Misaligned Eyes because our eyes are focused on the things of this life and this world rather than upon God and His will and work.

There's an interesting passage in the Bible that has to do with vision. It's not our primary text today, but it gets at what I want you to think with me about this morning. Let's look at it together. **READ MARK 8:22-25, p. 999.** Maybe this man's eyes had become matted shut and Jesus used His own saliva to help open the blind man's eyes. And when he did open his eyes, he could see, but

not clearly. So Jesus touches him again; then, he could see everything clearly. All of us are like that man to some extent. You may have met Jesus and become His follower. He's opened your eyes spiritually speaking, but you still don't see people clearly - not the way Jesus sees them. We all have a "lens", don't we? Your assumptions, your perceptions and your judgments have a powerful influence on how you see the world and other people.

How does God see people? I think of this Bible verse: "...The LORD doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7 NLT). How did Jesus see people when He walked the earth? The Bible says: "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." (Matthew 9:36 NLT) Here's the first question today:

HOW CAN I SEE LIKE JESUS?

Let me state a simple assumption that I hope you'll agree with. If you have given Jesus your heart, you also need to give Him your eyes. In other words, if you have given Jesus your loyalty, your allegiance, your worship, your obedience – everything represented in that word "heart" - , then doesn't it make sense that you need to give Him your spiritual eyes - the "lens" with which you look at the world, generally, and at people, specifically? Let's look at our main Bible text now. It explains why Jesus saw people the way He did and how we can begin to see like He does. **READ, p. 1018.**

Let me set the scene for you. This story is very early in Jesus' public ministry, but already He's starting to become famous. He returns to His hometown of Nazareth on a Sabbath day. He goes to the synagogue which is filled with people. The men and their sons are sitting on backless benches while up in the balcony are the moms, wives and daughters. In the front of the room are a row of elders. One of them asks Yeshua ben Yusef – Jesus, son of Joseph – to read from the scriptures. Jesus gets up and walks to the middle of the room where there is a kind of podium. There's a real buzz in the room because all kinds of amazing stories have been circulating about this hometown boy. Someone carries a heavy scroll to the podium and hands it to Jesus. The scroll contains the writings of the Old Testament prophet, Isaiah.

Jesus unrolls the large scroll. There are no chapter or verse divisions as in your Bible, but He eventually finds what we call Isaiah 61:1-2. He begins to read and it sounds different – like a self-proclamation. "The Spirit of the Lord is on me," Jesus reads. And v. 14 already told us this was literally true – "Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit." "Because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Then Jesus rolls up the scroll, gives it back to the attendant

and sits down. Everyone is staring at him. You can hear a pin drop. Then, Jesus simply says, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

How can I see like Jesus? Yes, if I give this Jesus my heart, I then need to give Him my eyes. And I would suggest that another aspect of seeing like Jesus sees is the assumption that when I become Jesus' follower, His personal mission must become my personal mission. For people who still think Jesus never claimed to be anyone special, this passage refutes such a notion. Everyone in that room including Jesus knew that passage in Isaiah applied to the Messiah. Jesus is saying that He is the One Isaiah was writing about. He is the Messiah. And this passage is kind of like Jesus' mission statement. This is why He's on the planet. This is what His life is all about. The implication? If you've become His follower, this is now why you're on the planet. This is what your life is all about. Now, here's an important second question:

WHAT WAS JESUS' MISSION?

Well, let's look more closely at what He said. Jesus' mission was to preach good news to the poor. In His day, people thought that being rich was always a sign of God's favor and being poor was always a sign of God's displeasure. Jesus rejected that kind of theology. His words and actions indicate that Jesus believed that God favored the poor and had a special place in His heart for them. In a wider sense, Jesus was saying God cares deeply for all people especially those who had been made to feel for any reason that God could care less about them. Jesus' mission was to proclaim freedom for the prisoner. Whether you are literally imprisoned or spiritually imprisoned, Jesus is all about setting you free to know God in a personal way.

Jesus' mission was to give sight to the blind. Again, in His day, it was thought that people were blind because God was punishing them for some sin they or their parents had committed. Jesus rejected that kind of theology. Jesus came to heal and show mercy to people who were both physically handicapped and felt spiritually condemned, excluded and left out. Jesus' mission was to release the oppressed. He came to set wrongs right. He came to help the helpless. He came to bring justice to those who had experienced injustice. Jesus' mission was to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. That was a reference to the Old Testament year of Jubilee when slaves were freed and all debts were cleared. I believe He was pointing even then to the cross and what He would do there through His death and resurrection, namely pay the debt of your sin and mine and end our slavery to spiritual death.

I've been around long enough now to have witnessed a healthy change in how we define Jesus' mission. When I was growing up, I was led to believe that Jesus' mission was only about getting people to accept Him as Savior so they could go to heaven when they died. It was limited to getting saved or being born again. I was taught that to help the poor, feed the hungry, clothe the naked or

house the homeless was to buy into something called “the social gospel” or theological liberalism. Now, there was some truth to that fear because theological liberals often have dismissed the whole idea of being born again spiritually. If Jesus is just one way to God rather than the only, exclusive way to an eternal relationship with God then you tend to de-emphasize the need for a personal conversion experience. That’s a serious mistake. After all, Jesus made this additional statement about His mission. “For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.” (Luke 19:10 NLT) That’s clearly about finding God, knowing God and having a personal relationship with Him forever.

But, it’s also a serious mistake to limit Jesus’ mission to personal salvation. Knowing and finding God changes everything. You now see people as creatures made in God’s image who receive His care and love even before they become Christians or even if they never become followers of Jesus. So, part of our mission as individuals and also as a church is to be channels of God’s compassion and love wherever we run into a need. We’re encouraged to do that in tangible, practical ways. If someone’s hungry, we feed him. If someone’s sick, we provide medical care to her. If someone needs a new backpack for school, we give it. If someone needs help with homework, we tutor her. If someone needs a friend and advisor, we offer a mentor. All of that is worth offering and doing even if those on the receiving end never receive Jesus as their Savior and Lord personally. But, more often than not, God uses your practical demonstrations of His love to create a spiritual hunger in the hearts of lost people so that one day they cross the line of faith and receive Jesus as Savior.

Nothing brings me greater joy than when I see someone receive Jesus as Savior as the result of a worship service or a ministry program in our church. And nothing brings me greater joy than when I see our church – or members of our church – demonstrating God’s compassionate love in some tangible, practical way because I know that’s just as much Jesus’ mission. Can’t both be Jesus’ mission? Can’t we invite people to accept Jesus as Savior and show compassion, too? Jesus did both. We need to do both as well. And the exciting thing is that God has put our church in a geographic location where people need both a powerful witness to Jesus as the only Savior and Lord as well as compassionate, practical help. We just need to figure out as a church where we can best offer that help and then do it. Here’s a final question.

HOW DID JESUS’ MISSION AFFECT HIS VISION?

It’s fair to say – isn’t it? – after looking at Luke 4:14-21 that Jesus’ mission was people-focused, outward-focused and mercy or compassion-driven. The rest of the Gospels confirm in Jesus’ words and actions the power of that mission upon our Lord. It’s not an overstatement, then, to say that Jesus’ mission was the secret to His vision: how He saw the world and the people in it. His mission shaped and guided His vision. And that vision – that set of spiritual lens through which He saw life – might best be defined by one word: compassion.

Here's a fascinating insight. Did you know that the word for "compassion" in the New Testament is only applied to one person: Jesus. Yeah, there is one exception – the good Samaritan in Jesus' story – but he may well have been a fictional character. Compassion is a major attribute in Jesus' character. Just look at all these verses that specifically mention Jesus' compassion! "When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick." (Matthew 14:14 NIV) "Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him." (Matthew 20:34 NIV) "As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, 'Don't cry.'" (Luke 7:12-13 NIV) "Jesus called his disciples to him and said, 'I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way.'" (Matthew 15:32 NIV) "Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. 'I am willing,' he said. 'Be clean!'" (Mark 1:41 NIV) And then, once again: "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." (Matthew 9:36 NIV)

What you believe is your mission in the world will affect how you see the world – that's your vision. So, when you see your world and the people in it – the people in your neighborhood, the people in your workplace, the people in your school, the people in your family, the people who live within a mile or two of this church – what do you see? Do you see people in need? Do you see people worth saving? Do you see people worth serving? You will, if you see the world and the people who live in it from Jesus' point of view.

There are so many diverse and incredibly important ways to serve Jesus by serving others. Ask the Lord to cultivate your capacity for compassion. You can show compassion inside the church: reach out to a divorced person, become a mentor or a tutor, pay regular visits on one of our shut-ins. You can show compassion outside the church: reach out to international students or refugee families, help out at a pregnancy center, volunteer through a relief agency or visit someone in jail. Ask God to touch your eyes so that you can see people the way Jesus did. Ask the Holy Spirit to allow Jesus' mission to guide your vision. If you can see people through the lens of Jesus' compassion, you'll discover practical ways to show them His love.