

I. Introduction

[Story of recent trip to Austin sharing different musical tastes.] I am not ashamed to say that I am a classical music nerd. If you ever want to talk shop about Bach, Beethoven, or other composers, just find me and we'll have a great conversation.

Music also played an integral role in my journey of faith. I always thought it amazing that certain sounds played at certain times in certain ways could evoke such strong emotions, memories, and reactions. Music helped me realize there was a spiritual realm that transcends the physical and that it had an otherworldly power because it was a gift from God. Music touches the very inner core of our being; it is the language of the soul.

Perhaps many of you once played an instrument growing up. Yes, the obligatory violin or piano lessons is a real phenomenon in Asian families. I happened to choose cello because it was bigger than the violin (and I think I chose correctly!). Or, some of you have children and you want them to learn one. Titus, my oldest son, is learning the piano and it is hard not to comment when he is practicing. Usually, it's corrective in nature ("Check your notes!" "Don't rush!" "Not so loud!"). Sometimes I am tempted to tell him what Bach said: "It's easy to play any musical instrument: all you have to do is touch the right key at the right time and the instrument will play itself."

But, lately, I've been reminding him of something else Bach said: "The aim and final end of all music should be none other than the glory of God and the refreshment of the soul." And even more than that, I want my son to *know* the music beyond what's simply on the page; for him to understand and communicate this language of the soul. I tell him that truly understanding music is more than just seeing the notes and hearing them played. It's about expressing the heart of the composer through his own heart. As Beethoven wrote on the title page of what he thought was his greatest work (*Missa Solemnis*), "From the heart—may it go to the heart."

Beloved, do you ever feel like your faith is like playing the notes flawlessly, but lacking soul and heart? You might have memorized all the faith motions. You can stay in rhythm with the worship elements. You can even "perform" well enough for others to think you have a close relationship with God. But, deep down, you still wonder... "Is this all there is? Is God really listening to me? How can I see him more clearly so that I may glorify him as the great Composer of us all?" Or maybe some of you struggle even to play any notes at all because the whole Christian thing has become too familiar, pointless, or painful.

In today's passage, we will understand what it means to really *know* Christ. Though we may struggle as the disciples did with being spiritually deaf and blind, and perhaps even have hardened hearts, we learn from the three miracles and Jesus' encounter with the Pharisees that **faith is the key to knowing Christ**. It is the key in three ways: (1) we see Jesus as the compassionate provider through eyes of faith, (2) we heed Jesus' warning against unbelief with ears of faith, and (3) we finally understand who Jesus truly is by a cross-shaped heart of faith. So, it's first eyes of faith, then ears of faith, and finally a heart of faith.

I. See Jesus as the compassionate provider through eyes of faith (7:31-8:10)

First, let's look at eyes of faith. From Mark 7:31 to 8:10, we read the account of two miracles that remind us to see Jesus through eyes of faith as our compassionate provider.

Sermon Manuscript (Mark 7:31-8:26)
Deaf, Blind, and Hardened
Melvin Huang (Preached at HCC on 5.3.26)

We see the friends of a deaf and mute man bring him to Jesus, begging our Lord to lay his hand on him, since Jesus was known to heal by touch. We read that this poor man was not just deaf but suffered from a “speech impediment,” which implies that at some point he knew how to speak. Probably later in life he became deaf, which caused him to have great difficulty speaking. This led to the man being socially isolated.

Now Jesus is of course aware of this man’s fears and insecurities. In verse 33 he compassionately takes him aside to heal him privately so as not to make him a public spectacle. Back then, people who were deaf, mute, blind or had any sort of disability or deformity were considered cursed by God and unclean. They were ostracized from society; they were deemed the untouchables. So, it is remarkable that Jesus touches this “unclean” man and tenderly leads him aside. He shows him that he is not forsaken by God, that though he is an outcast in society, he has a seat at God’s table.

And he touches the man’s ears and tongue, indicating he knew exactly what the problem was. This allowed the man, who could obviously not hear Jesus talk, understand what Jesus was going to do. Physical contact was an expression of Jesus’ compassion. This applied not only to his hands but his saliva. Although we might think using spit is disgusting today, back then, the spittle of certain persons was considered to have healing power when applied to an area of sickness or injury.

So, Jesus looks to heaven in verse 34, looking to his Father for mercy, sighs, then says “Ephphatha” (ἐφφαθά), which Mark translates as “Be opened.” Mark preserves the original Aramaic, because it’s likely Peter’s recollection of Jesus’ actual words. **Jesus sighs because he empathizes with the suffering of this man.** The sorrows of this man were Jesus’ sorrows too. He realizes the effect of the fall on humanity. Like him weeping at the tomb of Lazarus, our Lord saw the devastating effects of sin and was heartbroken over it.

Beloved, your sorrows are his as well. He empathizes with your suffering. He laments over the devastating effects of sin in your life. When you suffer injustice, betrayal, abuse, or sickness, Jesus sighs in empathy and compassion over such sins. But, he does more than just empathize and sigh, he will confront sin and defeat it forever! But more on that later.

As soon as Jesus utters his words “Be opened!” the man is instantly healed and he speaks plainly. Before we move on, I want to show how meaningful this particular incident is. It’s only recorded in Mark and he uses an incredibly rare word for “speech impediment” (*mogilalon*). The only other place it’s used in the Bible is in the Greek translation of the Old Testament. Isaiah 35, verses 5 and 6 reads: “*Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.*”

Isaiah 35 follows a series of chapters where God judges the nations. It is a chapter of future hope and the joy of all creation at the revelation of the Lord. So, **Jesus’ healing of the deaf and mute man signals the arrival of God, and the everlasting joy that comes with that.** Isaiah prophesied that the tongue of the mute will sing for joy.

Can you imagine the joy of this healed man and his friends, and the songs of praise they must have been singing? And though Jesus charges them not to tell anyone in verse 35, once this man’s tongue is touched by Christ and loosed, he cannot help but proclaim all the good he has done for him. The people marvel, saying in verse 37 that Jesus has “done all things well.” Indeed, our Lord cannot do anything badly. Even if we are

going through pain and suffering, we must look to Christ who is above, with eyes of faith, and remember that because he does all things well, we can by faith sing amidst such pain: *It is well, it is well with my soul.*

So, in this opening miracle, we see the great compassion of Christ on this man. And we see it on display again in the feeding of the 4,000 in chapter 8. If you have some *déjà vu* in reading about this miracle, I don't blame you. There are many similarities here to Jesus' feeding of the 5,000 in chapter 6. There is once again a large crowd of hungry followers, Jesus' compassion, bread and fish, doubtful disciples, multiplication of food, people being satisfied, and leftover fragments. Yet, this is not just a retelling of what happened before; it is a separate event. There are many significant differences between the two feedings, such as the number of people and bread loaves, the people sitting on the ground (not grass), the crowd having not eaten for 3 days, the types of baskets used, and Jesus (not his disciples) directing the people. Most importantly, Jesus makes express reference to two distinct feeding events in 8:19-20.

Jesus once again shows compassion on the crowd. Chapter 8, verse 2 is the only place in the gospels where he says in the first person, *"I have compassion."* What's remarkable is that his compassion is on Gentiles. The feeding of the 5,000 were Jews, but here it is 4,000 Gentiles. From Mark 7:31 we know that Jesus is in the region of the Decapolis, where he had healed the demoniac back in chapter 5. It is solidly Gentile territory. Like disabled people, Gentiles were excluded from Jewish life, considered as unclean, morally corrupt, and outsiders. Yet Jesus goes out to them. **God's grace is for everyone, and not just Israel.** Is it any surprise then that once again in verse 8 we read, *"And they ate and were satisfied"?*

How often in vain we try to look to other things to feed us like power, entertainment, money, career, family, or reputation, but those can never satisfy. In fact, they keep demanding more from us, and then become idols that make us feed them. Only Jesus can truly satisfy as our compassionate provider.

Beloved, do you have eyes of faith to see this?

II. Heed Jesus' warning against unbelief with ears of faith (8:11-21)

After Jesus gets in a boat and gets to Dalmanutha, immediately we see that the Pharisees come to Jesus but not with good motives. They came to argue. How? By demanding a sign from heaven. For what purpose? To test him. This ominous opening brings sets us up for our second point this morning: we are to heed Jesus' warning against unbelief with ears of faith.

The word "test" in English is too weak. In the original Greek, "test" means to harangue or harass and be hostile. It was last used in 1:13 when Satan came to test Jesus in the wilderness. So, this seemingly innocent request is actually an "insidious rerun of Satan's temptation" (McKenna, 168). In Mark's gospel, the demand for signs has consistently negative connotations because it signifies a stubborn refusal to believe.

Illustration: As a lawyer, I had to draft contracts for internal clients. The stubborn ones would keep insisting on me explaining some of my changes, especially when it seemed inconvenient to them. Of course, I was happy to explain to them why I thought it was necessary to include certain language. But, they refused to accept my explanations and kept asking for more. At some point, I refused to keep obliging them. It was clear they would not accept my advice nor really listen to me.

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Similarly, the Pharisees demand a sign not as an honest inquiry but to challenge the trustworthiness of Jesus' character and authority behind his acts. They are hypocrites as Jesus says in Matt 16:2-3. Recall that Nicodemus, a Pharisee himself, said to Jesus in John 3:2: "*Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.*" They already know he was from God, but they hypocritically ask for more proof about his identity!

So, once again Jesus sighs. But this time, it is "deeply in his spirit" in verse 12; it comes out of a deep, sad, exasperation of the Pharisee's hardness of hearts. He has been more than patient with their incessant and stubborn demands. But, even God's patience has limits! Have you ever sighed like this? Children can evoke this response...we want them to believe and understand, but they can't or refuse to...you just throw up your hands and all you can do is sigh loudly.

If only the Pharisees had asked to understand better, not to increase their doubt! They are proof that the more signs a person demands or requires, the less faith he has. **Jesus is patient to deal with honest intellectual inquiries but he will not pander to intellectual arrogance.** It is okay to ask God to reveal himself to you, but to demand signs reveals more of a stubborn heart of unbelief than a pliable heart of seeking.

And, for those of you who are seeking, have you considered all of the signs that God has already given you? The signs from creation and science that there is a Creator (e.g., the Big Bang, the fine-tuning of the universe for life, the origin of information in our DNA, etc.), signs from our inner sense of morality, signs from the uniqueness of humanity in terms of creativity and self-reflection, and signs from the historic fulfillment of prophecies from Scripture in Christ. Seriously consider these signs with your reason and see with eyes of faith that God exists and that Jesus is God. Do not be a part of "this generation" that Jesus laments over; a group of unbelievers who persist in their lack of faith and will be judged by God.

After this disheartening encounter with the Pharisees, Jesus leaves them. He then turns to his disciples in verses 14 to 21, warning them to be alert against their influence. In verse 15, he says, "*Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.*"

Now what is the leaven Jesus is talking about? Whenever the Pharisees have confronted Jesus, they have insisted on a system of religious rules and rigidity. And yet, this system reveals their hypocrisy and abandonment of God's commands for the traditions of men as we saw in the episode concerning Corban in Mark 7. Herod, on the other hand, was obsessed with his self-image, as we saw in his lavish birthday party back in Mark 6, and colluded with the Pharisees against Jesus (3:6). Both were staunch opponents of our Lord and threats to his life. Both represented human systems of thought that stem from the evil corruption of human nature. Both are **rooted in unbelief**, a lack of faith.

The disciples, though not rejecting Christ, struggle to believe too. In verse 16, we read that they once again misinterpret Jesus' words to refer to physical rather than spiritual things. They think Jesus is talking about literal bread, when in fact he is warning them about unbelief.

In verse 17. Jesus says to them, "*Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened?*" Here Jesus identifies the root of unbelief and the inability to see or hear correctly. It is a hardened heart. After Jesus' feeding of the 5,000 and walking on the sea, Mark wrote how the disciples were "*utterly astounded, for they for they did not understand about the*

loaves, but their hearts were hardened.” This was so because they kept trying to fit Jesus into their preconceived notion of who the Messiah should be: a political-warrior king, not the Suffering Servant of God.

But, through a series of 8 successive questions from verses 18 to 20, the Master gently guides his disciples into understanding. He refers to his miraculous mass feedings to remind them that he is the compassionate Shepherd of all, not a political-warrior king of Israel only. He came not to conquer, but to save. His feedings were not so much to display power as they were to **reveal the one who wielded such power.**

That is why when he ends his dialogue in verse 21 with the piercing question, “*Do you not yet understand?*” Jesus is referring to himself. The disciples fail to understand because they fail to remember who Jesus is! We can easily think the disciples are just so thick-headed and unable to grasp anything until we see our own faces in them. Are we not one of them? Do we not also forget who Jesus is amidst our struggles and sufferings? **Proximity to Jesus does not guarantee being one with him in mission and purpose.** Look at Judas Iscariot. He knew Jesus as one of the twelve, but he did not *know* him as Lord and Savior. He knew but did not know.

Remember, the central question of Mark is, “Who is Jesus?” How you answer that question will change everything: who you are, what you live for, how you make decisions, how you raise your children, how you view life and death, etc. We’ve all met people who hear and see us but yet they don’t really know who we are. Superficially, they know our names, they say “hi,” and may know some basic facts about our lives, but they don’t *know* us. They know, but they don’t know.

Friends, Jesus *knows* you better than anyone else. In fact, he knows you better than you know yourself. That has profound implications for how you view yourself and approach life. Again, it changes everything. Jesus knows you, but the real question is: **Do you know Jesus?** And this is why Jesus warns so sternly against unbelief, which is the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod.

Beloved, do you have ears of faith to heed Jesus’ warning?

III. Understand who Jesus truly is by a cross-shaped heart of faith (8:22-26)

We move onto the final miracle of our passage today. In it, we see everything being pulled together and also our third point, which is that we need a cross-shaped heart of faith to fully understand who Jesus is.

Once more, we see a group of anonymous friends bringing a suffering man and begging Jesus to heal him. It happened with the deaf and mute man and it happens here again in verse 22 with this blind man. These dear friends implore Christ; they beg him to deliver the man. They were the closest thing to family for this man, who was surely an outcast like the deaf-mute man.

We all need friends like these, don’t we? They are acting the way a church should, as a **spiritual family whose members reach out to one another in need and point them to Christ.** HCC, can we be such a church! As I heard at the conference this past week in SoCal, “The gospel is made visible through the church when it becomes your spiritual family.” So, starting today, make it your aim to know people beyond a friendly “hi” and smile. Even after service today, get to know someone new or someone you already know better. Because we cannot be a family if we don’t really know one another.

Similar to the first healing miracle, Jesus compassionately takes this blind man outside the village to a private place and also uses his spit to touch him. But, quite unexpectedly, the man is not healed upon the first touch.

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This is the only healing miracle in the gospels that requires an additional touch by Jesus. Now, we may think that it was Jesus who was deficient or that somehow this blindness was particularly difficult to heal. But those would be mistaken conclusions.

Jesus' actions are always purposeful; there is never a wasted motion or word in our Lord's work. Jesus asks the man how he is doing and the man is honest enough to say that while he sees in part, it's still foggy. He sees men walking around like trees. It is only after a second touch by Jesus that the man's "*sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly*" (v25).

What is going on here? Remember, Jesus performs this miracle *after* he warns his disciples against the leaven of unbelief and having hardened hearts. Jesus' two-stage healing here is not just a miraculous act, but a parable of the **disciples' lingering spiritual blindness that would not be fully cured until the cross and resurrection of our Lord**. The full glory and revelation of the Lord will not be on display until the cross. And understanding him in this way will require a new heart of faith.

We walk by faith, not by sight (1 Cor 5:7). But, how many of us are still walking by sight? We may see, yet we don't see. We hear, but we don't hear. **We know but we don't know**. We may *read* the words of Scripture, but we don't really know the Savior to whom they point. We may see what a Christian life is like, but we don't see the true purpose behind it. We may *hear* a sermon preached, but we don't hear God's voice speaking through it. We may *live* what we think is a good life, but we don't really live for God at all. Or, perhaps some of you have a saving experience of Jesus Christ, but still remain in a place where you struggle to see him clearly.

What do you need to do? **You need to come to the cross**. The leaven of the Pharisees was like spiritual cancer of unbelief that spreads in the body, bringing about eventual death. We were once afflicted with this cancer. Before the Spirit gave us new our hearts, we were like the deaf and mute man, unable to hear the voice of God and praise him. We were like the blind man, unable to see his glory!

But, praise be to God that our death sentence was reversed at the cross. Knowledge of just Jesus' wonders, teachings, and compassion is inadequate. Adequate knowledge will only come through suffering and the cross. Remember Mark's central question throughout is "Who is this Jesus?" In the first verse, he asserts he is the Christ, the Son of God. But, it is only at the cross that the centurion would exclaim, "*Truly this man was the Son of God!*" (15:39). Peter will be the first human in Mark's gospel to confess Jesus as the Christ, but when he tries to keep him from going to the cross, the Lord turns around and rebukes him, even calling him Satan! The cross is the key to understanding who Jesus is.

So, I ask you: "Are you seeing or hearing only in part because **your faith is a crossless Christianity?**" If you see Jesus as merely your friend, your role model, your support, your counselor, or your teacher and *not your all in all*, then you have a crossless faith. If you pray to Jesus to bless your plans, or help yourself or your family be successful in this world *more than* asking him to glorify himself through your life, no matter the cost, then you have a crossless faith. If you seek to follow Jesus only if he provides for you and makes your life better, but not to suffer for his sake, then you have a crossless faith.

What do you need to do? Pray that the Spirit forge a faith within your heart that is shaped by the cross. Ask him to help you see Jesus clearly through the cross! Beg the Spirit to soften your hardened heart by the cross

so you can echo what Paul says in Galatians 2:20: *“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”* Christ came not to improve your life, but died to save it. He came not to be your guide, but was resurrected to be your Lord! He seeks not your performance or offerings, but your very heart.

Jesus’ touching and transforming your heart means the Father has removed your heart of stone, and given you eyes to see and ears to hear. In short, he has gifted you a new heart of faith. By this heart of faith, you can truly cherish the truth that because your Savior died for you, you are made forever right with God. With a cross-shaped heart of faith, you can see clearly the glory of God and have everlasting hope.

IV. Conclusion

It moves me deeply to think that after Jesus’ second touch, the first thing the formerly blind man saw clearly was the face of his Lord. Paul writes that in the face of Jesus Christ is the “light of the knowledge of the glory of God” (2 Cor 4:6). God told Moses in Exodus 33:20 that no one could see his face and live. Yet, this man saw the glory of God in the face of Christ...and lived!

I can only imagine that this man, with tears streaming down his face, reached out to touch the face of his Master and then bowed down in worship and gratitude for all that he did. And I am sure he made music to the Lord with his heart (Ephesians 5:19).

Beloved, are you also this man? Do not perform memorized notes for Christ that are technically flawless but lack heart and faith. Instead, with your cross-shaped heart of faith, know him truly and fully, and make music to him, singing songs from your heart to his heart.

[Closing prayer]