

## O Say Can You See? - Matthew 16:1-12

**Introduction:** While eating lunch, 5-year-old Timmy out of the blue, asked his mother, *"Mommy, what does God look like?"*

His mother said, *"Well Timmy, God is a Spirit and we can't see Him like we see people."*

But little Timmy persisted, *"But if we can't see Him, how do we know what He's like?"* he asked.

His mother thought for a moment and said, *"Well, if you were blind, you wouldn't be able to see your Daddy, would you?"* He shook his head no. *"But you'd still you know what your Daddy is like by the things he says, wouldn't you?"* Timmy nodded in agreement.

*"Well, we know what God is like, too, by the things He says in His Word. And you'd know that Daddy loves you, because he tells you and does things for you. That's how we know God loves us, too. He tells us so, and He does so many wonderful things for us. But most of all, He gave us Jesus to show us what God is really like. So even though you couldn't see Daddy if you were blind, you could still hear his voice and feel when he is near. And in the same way, through Jesus we can hear God's voice and feel Him near, too. That's why, even though we can't see God, we know what He is like."*

Little Timmy thought about all that his mother had said, and said, *"I get it! Why didn't you just say that we can't see God outside, but we can see Him on the inside?"*

Good eyesight is something we all want. I don't know of anyone who wants to be blind or even have poor eyesight, and to prove it, it is estimated that Americans spend over five billion dollars each year on optometrists, glasses, contact lenses and laser surgery.

When Jesus encountered a blind man named Bartimaeus, He asked him what he wanted Him to do for Him. Bartimeaus answered, *"I want to see."* And Jesus immediately restored his sight. But old Bartimaeus got more than his physical sight that day. He also received spiritual sight for the Bible says the he *"followed Jesus along the road."* Mark 10:52 (NIV). Not only did he see Jesus on the outside, he saw him in the inside too.

Today's message is about seeing God on the inside. As important as it is to have two good eyes to see, it is far more important to be able to see spiritually. But not everyone is able to see spiritually. In fact, everyone is infected with the disease of spiritual blindness. On our own power, we're not able to see spiritually. So we need to call on the Great Physician to help us see.

Jesus came to give us spiritual sight. He stood in the synagogue in His home town of Nazareth and read

from the prophet Isaiah, Isaiah 61:1-2, *“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, 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...”* Jesus came because of our spiritual blindness and our inability to see our need for God. There are 3 reasons for this spiritual blindness. First, it’s:

**1. Our Sin.** Jesus said in **John 3:19 (NIV)** *“This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.”* We’re all born in sin, but we all choose to sin as well. We’re spiritually blind because we choose to be. But another reason we’re spiritually blind is because it’s:

**B. Satan’s Strategy.** **2 Cor. 4:4 (NIV)** says, *“The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”* Satan’s strategy is to keep the light of Jesus hidden from our hearts. He doesn’t want us to see God on the inside, and He’s doing all he can to prevent us from seeing our need for God. Third, there’s:

**C. God’s Sovereignty.** Now I’m not saying that God causes us to be spiritually blind. But, according to God’s Word, when people persistently resist God’s light, He gives them over to their self-chosen darkness. Jesus said about the people of Jerusalem in **Luke 19:42 (NIV)** *“If you... had only known on this day what would bring you peace--but now it is hidden from your eyes.”* So, God doesn’t cause spiritual blindness, but if that is what folks want, He’ll let them wander around in their darkness. That is what was happening to the people in our text today. They were spiritually blind, and perfectly content to stay that way.

Today, we’re going to look at the characteristics of the spiritually blind and of those who are given spiritual sight. First let’s notice:

### **1. The Spiritually Blind (1-4).**

Spiritual blindness is a universal condition, but remaining in spiritual darkness is a matter of choice. Nobody would choose physical blindness but, some remain spiritually blind because they want to. There are a couple of reasons for this. First, it’s because of:

**A. Unbelief (READ 1).** The *“Pharisees and Sadducees”* came to Jesus demanding a sign from heaven. The *“Pharisees”* hated Him because He rejected their traditions. The *“Sadducees”* hated Him because He insisted upon the spiritual. But both groups were united in their unbelief of Jesus as Messiah.

2,000 years have passed and still things remain the same. There are still religious people who refuse to

believe in Jesus because His truth doesn't jive with their traditions. There are still liberal thinkers who refuse to believe Jesus, because if they did, they would have to believe what they cannot see. Both are spiritually blind in unbelief.

But also, some will remain spiritually blind because of:

**B. Unrecognized Signs (READ 2-4).** These two groups demanded Jesus to *"show them a sign from heaven."* They had already seen Him heal the sick, give sight to the blind, make the lame to walk, cast out demons and many other supernatural works.

They didn't deny His supernatural power. But, they attributed His power to Satan. They wanted *"a sign from heaven"* or from the sky. They thought he wouldn't be able to produce one so they wanted to publicly discredit His power as not being from God.

What they couldn't see because of their spiritual blindness is that Jesus Himself was a *"sign from heaven."* When Simeon saw the baby Messiah in the temple, he prophesied, *"This Child is destined (to be)... a sign that will be spoken against"* (Luke2:34 NIV). And in the Pharisees and Sadducees, his prophecy was fulfilled because they were set on darkness. They rejected the light from heaven.

Jesus answer to them in was, *"You have signs from heaven every day about the weather, and you understand it, but when the true sign from heaven appears, you don't even recognize Him. In fact you reject Him and demand another. You're nothing but hypocrites!"*

With that final statement, Jesus left them. The Greek word for *"left"* is *"kataliepo"* which means *"to abandon."* Because they refused to believe and refused to see the true sign from heaven, Jesus abandoned them in their blindness.

Though God is *"rich in mercy,"* and He gives people chance after chance to believe in Him, people can come to the point where God's grace will be rejected for the last time. When folks continue to rebel against Him, and refuse to repent and accept Him, they'll remain spiritually blind, and ultimately God will have no choice but to leave them alone in their blindness. But thankfully, not all will remain spiritually blind. Finally, let's look at:

## **2. The Spiritually Aware**

Some will receive their sight by the grace of God. Some will experience the light of Christ in their darkness and become aware of their need for God. What do you have to do to have your sight restored? First,

you must:

**A. Follow After Jesus (READ 5).** When Jesus left, so did the disciples. The word “*disciple*” means a follower. They followed Jesus to the other side of the lake.

Now let me try to explain the significance of their following Jesus. You have to understand that all but one of Jesus’ disciples was Jewish. That meant that all their lives they had been taught to respect and believe the religious systems of the Pharisees and Sadducees. By following Jesus, they were rejecting their own religion. They were risking being ostracized and ridiculed by their own people. They were giving up a lot by following Jesus. But they did so because they had seen the light and wanted even more of it!

Those who would receive their spiritual sight, do so because they are willing to follow Jesus rather than man. They deliberately choose to follow the path He has chosen. But that’s not all. If you want to have your spiritual sight restored, you must also:

**B. Listen to Jesus (READ 6-11).** As the disciples rowed across the lake, they realized that it was late in the day and their stomachs were starting to growl. They were going to miss their supper, and they weren’t too happy about it.

Jesus saw a chance to teach them something. He said, “*Be careful!... Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.*” The disciples didn’t understand. They said, “*It is because we didn’t bring any bread*” that Jesus said this. They thought He was talking about them avoiding the local P&S Supermarket to buy their food. They had completely forgotten about His confrontation with the Pharisees and Sadducees on the other side of the lake.

Have you ever done that? We do it most every Sunday. We come and worship with singing and praying and teaching. We hear a biblical sermon on spiritual truth, and immediately we go out and forget what we’ve heard. God might give us an opportunity to put what we’ve heard into practice, and we miss it. We’re too concerned with getting to our favorite restaurant before the Methodists do. Or we’re so wrapped up in ourselves; we can’t see the big picture. God is trying to teach us something spiritual and eternal, but all we’re interested in is the temporary and the physical.

Jesus wasn’t talking about them missing a meal. He was concerned that the truth of the gospel not be polluted by the “*yeast*” of the religious leaders.

He calls the hungry disciples “*you of little faith.*” He didn’t call them stupid, or one fry short of a happy

meal. He was saying they missed the point because they were not exercising *"faith."*

Jesus reminded them of the miracles of feeding the 5,000 and the 4,000 and having plenty left over. So they knew that if Jesus had wanted to, He could have created more food than they could ever eat. With that settled, Jesus drove home His point. He said, *"Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees."*

Yeast or leaven was the ingredient that made bread rise before baking. Throughout the Bible, most of the time yeast represents sin or the influence of sin. Jesus wanted His disciples who would later become the foundation of the church to never allow the gospel to be influenced by the sinful teachings of any false teachers.

And ultimately, the disciples listened to Jesus. They were beginning to see spiritually, but they needed to see more. People with spiritual sight not only follow Jesus, they will hang on His words. Finally, we see that if we're going our spiritual sight is going to be restored, we must:

**C. Learn From Jesus (READ 12).** We too need to stay in His Word and listen to His Spirit until we understand. We're often guilty of reading something into God's Word that isn't there. We tend to want to *"Americanize"* it. And when we do, we are missing the truth.

For example, in **Phil. 1:27 (KJV)** Paul says, *"Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ..."* and in **Phil. 3:20 (KJV)** he says, *"For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:"* Now if we read that without doing a word study of the word *"conversation,"* we'd think it's talking about a dialogue between us and God. But that's not what it means at all. *"Conversation"* is the Greek word, *politeuomai*, which means behavior or lifestyle, or the way one lives. Paul is saying in 1:27, *"behave or live your lives in according to the gospel of Christ,"* and in 3:20, he is saying that our real lives will be lived in heaven. So you see, we need to read and study the Bible for what it means, not for what we think it means, or not for what somebody has told us it means. We need to be like the Bereans, who *"sought the scriptures daily"* for the truth. God will give us as much spiritual sight as we are willing to receive.

**Conclusion:** There was once a blind French girl who was given a Braille copy of the gospel of Mark. She came to faith in Christ by reading it over and over again. She read it so much that her fingertips became hard and callused so that she could no longer feel the raised dots. So determined was she that she peeled the skin off her fingers to make them more sensitive. In so doing, she ruined the nerves. Devastated she picked up the book to kiss it goodbye. It was only then that learned that her lips were more sensitive than her fingers.

God always finds a way to shed light into the heart of anyone who seeks Him. Can you see your need for Him today? Don't look on the outside. Look for Him in the inside - with your spiritual eyes, and you'll find Him.