

INTRODUCTION

You might recognize the title from the television series, "Friday Night Lights." When I moved from Alabama twenty-four years ago I thought High School football was big there, but I soon learned that, like everything else, High School football is HUGE in Texas. The movie "Friday Night Lights" was based on the dynasty of Permian High School in Odessa. But in the television series that ran from 2006 through 2011, the action was set in a fictional town named Dillon, Texas. I really enjoyed watching the show. For you other Friday Night Lights fans, here are a couple of trivia facts. The show was mostly filmed in Austin, and the stadium used in the series is Pflugerville High School. Before the series began, Lindsay Lohan was offered a leading role, but she declined saying she wanted to concentrate on her movie career. Let me know how that's working out!

In the locker room of the Dillon Panthers, their slogan was painted on the wall: CLEAR EYES. FULL HEARTS. CAN'T LOSE. Peter Berg, the show's writer and producer, created the slogan. In 2012, Mitt Romney used that slogan for part of his campaign without giving any credit to the source. When Peter Berg heard about it, he contact the campaign and told them the phrase was plagiarized if they did not have his permission to use it.

So in the interest of full disclosure, I am citing that the source of this motto is Peter Berg. But that's the phrase that came to my mind when I read this miracle of Jesus healing a blind man. After encountering Jesus, the man had clear eyes, a full heart, and he couldn't lose.

Mark 8:22-26. "They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, 'Do you see anything?' He looked up and said, 'I see people; they look like trees walking around.' Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. Jesus sent him home, saying, 'Don't go into the village.'"

In 1972 Johnny Nash recorded his one-hit wonder, "I can see clearly now, the rain is gone." That's what this double miracle is all about. The blind man was touched, but he couldn't see clearly, so Jesus touched him again. Actually, Jesus touched him three different times, and these three touches teach us how God wants to deal with each one of us. Let's examine each touch.

I. THE FIRST TOUCH OF CONVICTION

Some friends brought the blind man to Jesus and the Bible says, "He took the blind man by the hand and let him outside the village."

They are in the city of Bethsaida, which is at the northern end of the Sea of Galilee. Here's the first lesson we learn:

A. Jesus wants to lead you away from unbelief

Bethsaida was a city full of unbelief. As I travel to Israel, I've noticed something unusual. Many of the cities that existed during the ministry of Jesus are still thriving cities. Tiberius is still a lively city. Cana, Jericho, and Bethlehem are all large cities. But there are two particular cities that are nothing but a bunch of ruins now. Those two cities are Capernaum and Bethsaida. Why is that?

The answer is because these were cities of unbelief. Jesus said, "Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes." (Luke 10:13) And in the next verse Jesus says that same thing about Capernaum. These cities rejected Jesus and now they lie in ruins. It's dangerous for a person or a city to reject Jesus.

Jesus wants to lead you away from unbelief and that's called conviction. Before Jesus returned to heaven, He told the disciples He would send the Holy Spirit. He had been WITH the disciples, but the Holy Spirit would live IN them. One of the main roles of the Holy Spirit is to convict us of sin and unbelief. Jesus said, "When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment." (John 16:8) Before Jesus can work in your life, you must realize that you are sinner and that you need forgiveness. In John 6:44 Jesus said no man can come to him unless the Father draws him. That's conviction. The second lesson is:

B. Jesus wants to relate to you on a personal level

Jesus led Him away from an unbelieving city, and then He dealt with him personally. Have you ever noticed in the Bible that Jesus never conducted any mass healing services? He always dealt with people individually. Jesus doesn't save groups of people, or families. He saves individuals. Sometimes people think they are Christians because they were born in a Christian home. But being born in a Christian home doesn't make you a Christian any more than being born in an airport makes you an airplane. God only has children, no grandchildren. You must have a personal encounter with Jesus.

It's always a great experience to go gather with thousands of people and worship. Corporate worship is a requirement for real believers. Being in a Bible study group is also an important requirement. But as great as being with other people is, I must say the sweetest times of worship I've ever had have been when I've been alone with the Lord in my quiet time.

The first thing Jesus did was to take this man by the hand and lead him away from unbelief into a place where He could deal with Him personally. That's the first touch of conviction. Can you remember the first time you felt your need for God?

II. THE SECOND TOUCH OF CONVERSION

Let's notice the second time Jesus touched the blind man. The Bible says, "When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, 'Do you see anything?' He looked up and said, 'I see people; they look like trees walking around.'" When Jesus removed His hands from the blind man's eyes, his vision was restored, but not perfectly. One moment, this man was living in darkness and the next moment, he was in the light. His eyes were opened, but his vision was

still blurry. For each of us who don't have naturally perfect 20/20 vision, you can relate to this state. How do things look when you take off your glasses or remove your contacts?

According to my eye Doctor, Jeff Pennell, about 2 out of 3 Americans need some kind of vision correction, so we can relate to this man's statement. Giving him sight was a miracle, but it was also a parable. In the Bible, moving from darkness to light is a symbol of conversion. 1 Peter 2:9 says, "God has called us out of darkness into his wonderful light." Let's learn a couple of important lessons about conversion.

A. Regeneration happens instantly

There is a great deal of misunderstanding concerning regeneration, which means being born again. To explain this truth simply, I'm going to draw an imaginary line on the platform. Everyone on this side of the line is lost without Jesus Christ. We were all here at one time. And when you step over the line, you move from darkness to light. The Bible also calls it passing from death unto life.

I'm not calling this step salvation, because the word salvation really refers to the entire purpose of God in your life. I'm talking about the point of conversion—the point of regeneration. Being born again is an instantaneous experience. You grow up to it, and hopefully, you grow from it, but there is a point where you move from death to life and from darkness to light.

In John 3 Jesus had a conversation with a very religious man named Nicodemus. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit." (John 3:5-6) Now notice I didn't just dream up this analogy of birth; Jesus chose it.

Through the years I've heard some people say, "Oh, I've always been a Christian." I have never challenged anyone on that, but I don't believe it's possible. It's like saying, "Oh, I've always been alive." To have ALWAYS been a Christian would mean you were born sinless and then you never sinned. The Bible says we have ALL sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We all need to be born again.

I've been attending a Baptist church all my life; in fact, I was attending a Baptist church nine months before I was born! I learned about God and Jesus at an early age. I could quote and sing scripture. I knew Jesus died on the cross for my sins. But I hadn't been born again.

But on Sunday evening, March 11, 1962, my pastor preached on the crucifixion of Jesus. I had heard it before, but that night, Jesus led me to the point of conviction. I realized for the first time that MY SIN had been responsible for His death. It broke my heart, and I literally ran down the aisle with tears streaming down my cheeks. I'm glad the pastor didn't just hand me a card to fill out. Instead he took a moment to explain to me that I could invite Jesus to come into my heart and save me. And as much as a 9-year-old boy could do, I gave my life to Jesus and He saved me that night. I was born again.

Like physical birth, regeneration happens instantly, and it only happens once. And just as you can't go back and undo your biological birth, you can't undo your spiritual birth. Now, is there anyone here who CAN'T tell me the date of your physical birth? I didn't say is there anyone who doesn't WANT to tell me! Even the youngest child knows their birthday (so they can have a party). January 16 is my biological birthday, and March 11 is my spiritual birthday. Do you know when your spiritual birthday is?

Chances are you have a birth certificate that says where you were born, and when you were born and it doesn't just give a date, it gives a time. There is a moment just before you were born, and then you were born. Now you may not remember the exact date and place of your new birth, like I do. But can you look back to a general time and place in your life when you passed from death to life? My wife can't remember the exact date, but she remembers it was during a Vacation Bible School at her home church when she was a child.

Billy Graham wrote a great book years ago entitled, *How to be Born Again*. In it, he talks about the exact time of his conversion. He was a rebellious 16-year-old in North Carolina. He accepted a friend's invitation to attend a tent crusade where the Baptist Evangelist Mordecai Ham was preaching. On the second night of the crusade, Billy Graham and his friend Grady Wilson came to the altar and gave their lives to Christ. Billy would later say that until that night his hero had been Babe Ruth, but that night Jesus Christ became his hero. He knew the exact place and date. And yet, Billy's wife, Ruth Belle Graham, didn't know the exact point of her conversion.

So although there is a definite point of regeneration; some remember it vividly, and some don't. If you don't remember the exact date, don't worry. The main thing is you know you HAVE passed from death to life.

Imagine that you're traveling from Texas to Louisiana. If you're driving on I-20 you know the exact moment you cross the state line. There's a sign and the pavement gets worse. That's like me knowing that on March 11, 1962 I was born again. But let's imagine you're flying in an airplane from Tyler to Shreveport. You don't know the exact moment you cross the state line, but you know without a doubt that when you land, you're in Louisiana. So even if you can't recall the exact time, do you know for sure you've passed from death to life? Actually, the more I think about it, if we're using this illustration about passing from death to life, maybe I should swap it around and talk about traveling from Louisiana to Texas instead!

B. God uses a variety of methods to lead us from death to life

The New Testament records Jesus healing seven different blind men. And in each case He employed a different method. God is a God of variety. He seldom saves two people the same way. Some people come to Christ in a dramatic way with tears and anguish, like I did. Others are so full of joy they laugh at the point of regeneration. Other people just quietly place their faith in Jesus. God saved the Apostle Paul by shining a bright light from heaven that knocked him off his feet. There's not another account of a similar conversion experience.

Sometimes we see how God works in someone else's life and we want to have the same experience, but remember that God is a God of variety. Vance Havner used to say if three of the

blind men had compared notes, they would have disagreed. One man said, "I was blind and Jesus touched me once, and I was healed. That's the way Jesus works." The second man says, "No. I was blind and Jesus touched me once, and I saw men as trees walking. Then He touched me again. That's the way Jesus works." A third man would say, "You're both wrong. I was blind and Jesus spit in the dirt and made clay and put it on my eyes and told me to wash it off in the Pool of Siloam. That's that way Jesus works." Vance Havner said if those three men were here we'd have three new church denominations within a week: The once-touched church; the twice-touched church; and the spit-in-the-eye church!"

There's the first touch of conviction; there's the second touch of conversion; and finally there's

III. THE THIRD TOUCH OF CORRECTION

The Bible says, "Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly." Jesus became the first optometrist! So why did Jesus touch him again? Did He fail the first time? Was Jesus a little tired that day? Why didn't the man have clear vision immediately? Jesus never does anything accidentally. I really think Jesus performed two miracles, or a two-part miracle to teach us a couple of lessons.

A. There is so much more to the Christian life than conversion

The tragedy is there are multitudes of Christians who have stepped over the line from darkness to light. They have their ticket to heaven punched, but they never grow in the salvation.

The main reason God saved you was NOT so you could go to heaven when you die, that's just one of the benefits. If going to heaven was the ONLY reason God saved you, the best thing we could do for everyone when they accept Christ is just hit them over the head and say, "Okay, now go on to heaven."

Romans 8 tells us the purpose for which God saved us is to grow us spiritually until we conform to the image of Jesus. He wants to mold our lives to be like Jesus. The Apostle Peter is a good example of how Jesus had to keep touching him to clarify his vision. Even after he was filled with the Holy Spirit, and the mighty message on the day of Pentecost, Peter still didn't see things the way Jesus saw things.

Simon Peter was a good kosher Jew. He would never eat non-kosher food and he would never enter the home of a Gentile. But there was a Gentile named Cornelius who needed someone to explain the Gospel to him. So God gave Peter an afternoon dream where he saw all kinds of unclean animals. In the dream, God said, "Go kill and eat these animals." Peter said, "No way, Lord!" God said, "What I call clean, don't you dare call unclean." God repeated the scene two more times, because Peter was a little slow to catch on. As soon as he woke up Peter was summoned by Cornelius' servants to visit in his home. When Peter arrived he was faced with a dilemma, should he, a proper Jew, enter the home of a Gentile? Then he remembered the dream and he said, "I am gradually coming to see that God is no respecter of persons." It all became clear and Peter went in and preached the gospel. God had to touch Peter again he could see things more clearly.

God wants to keep blessing you as He grows you to be like Jesus. Jesus touched me for conversion when I was nine. He touched me at age 17 when He called me to preach. He touched me again at age 20 when I came to understand the filling and the power of the Holy Spirit. I could go on and on. So here's my question for you:

B. Will you allow Jesus to continue to touch you to correct your faulty sight?

Sometimes we see things the wrong way and Jesus has to correct our spiritual vision. Jack Eckerd inherited a chain of drugstores from his father and expanded the business until there were almost 3,000 Eckerd drug stores. Today Eckerd's has been bought out by CVS and Rite Way.

Jack Eckerd was a hard-driving businessman and only a nominal Christian until he attended a men's retreat with his church in Clearwater, Florida. On this retreat, God did a new work in Jack's life. He touched his heart and Jack started seeing things differently. On Monday he walked into one of his stores and noticed for the first time they sold adult magazines with nude pictures. It disturbed him. Being a businessman, he called his CFO and told him he wanted to get rid of all those magazines from all of his stores. He asked the CFO how much money they would lose. The CFO called him back and said they would be losing \$500,000 a year. Jack said, "I don't care. Get rid of them." What happened? He started seeing things differently. He had clear eyes; a full heart; and he couldn't lose with that.

There's the first touch of conviction. Do you realize that you need Jesus? There's the second touch of conversion. Have you been born again? But when you step over this line and pass from death to life, God isn't finished with you. There's the third and fourth and fifth and hundredth touch of correction. The Bible says, "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6)

CONCLUSION

Most of us first learned about Lauren Hill's inspirational story last fall. She died Friday at the age of 19. She was diagnosed with inoperable brain cancer as a high school senior. She was tempted to give up quietly, but instead she asked God what He wanted her to do.

In an interview she said, "I asked God what He wanted me to do. I don't know what He sent me here for. Whatever you sent me here for, God, I'm ready to do."

She said God put a desire in her heart to play college basketball, and to raise awareness about pediatric cancer. Her goal was to play in at least one college game and to score a layup. To get inspiration, she listened repeatedly to Katy Perry's song, "Roar."

Last November the game was moved up because of her failing health, and before a crowd of over 10,000 screaming spectators, Lauren didn't score just one layup, she scored the first and the last points of the game. She exceeded her goal of playing in a college game—she played in four games and made five baskets. And in the process she inspired millions of people and helped raise over \$1.5 million for cancer research.

Her life was short, but God touched her life and gave her a goal. Would you be willing to tell God the same thing Lauren Hill said? She said, "Whatever You sent me her for God, I'm ready to do."

When you do that you can know you have a God-given purpose. He'll give you clear eyes; a full heart; and you can't lose!

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"When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment." *John 16:8*

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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