

When Hearing or Seeing is Not Always Believing  
Read Mark 4:3-20

Jesus' teaching in the gospel of Mark begins with a set of parables about hearing ears and seeing eyes. Mark records, however, that the ears do not always hear, nor is there much seeing going on. In fact, Jesus' dramatizes this enigma in one of these parables—the Parable of the Sower and the Seed. Only one of the four types of people in the parable performs with “**understanding**” once they “**hear**” (Mark 4:3-20). In keeping with this set of parables, the remainder of Mark's gospel contains a record of various people who either see or hear Jesus. These accounts include their responses—either belief or unbelief according to their initial “**understanding**” of Jesus' message (v. 13).

The first of Jesus' encounters with those who see or hear Him occurred after a tumultuous crossing on the stormy Sea of Galilee terminated at a cemetery (Mark 5:2-16). Suddenly, from amongst tombs, a man described as having an unclean spirit, “ran up” to Jesus after “**seeing** Jesus from a distance” (v. 6). Upon the removal of the unclean spirit the former demon possessed man “was imploring Jesus” that he might go with Jesus (vv. 13, 18). Thus, this man's response to “**seeing**” Jesus is belief.

On the other hand, the people who “came to **see**” what all the commotion was about, reached a different point of view (v. 16). When those “who had **seen** the miracle, had related the whole account to the new arrivals, they also began “imploring Jesus” (v. 17). But this “imploring” was a request that Jesus leave the vicinity—a demonstration of their unbelief.

The next example is found in two narratives that are interwoven (Mark 5:21-43). Jairus, a religious ruler, “upon **seeing** Jesus,” fell at His feet and “implored Him earnestly” to heal his daughter. Jesus' journey to Jairus' house, though, was interrupted by a woman who “had had a hemorrhage for twelve years” (v. 25). After “**hearing** about Jesus,” she decided to touch Jesus' garment in order to be healed (v. 27). In these cases, Jairus and the woman believed, although Jairus needed prompting (vv. 34, 36). Hence, because of their belief, both the woman and daughter of Jairus were healed.

Nevertheless, Jesus' own hometown rejected Him (6:1-6). On the Sabbath day, Jesus “began to teach in the synagogue” before “many **hearers**” (v. 2). But the hearers “took offense at Him” causing Jesus to “wonder at their unbelief” (vv. 3 and 6).

Most shocking of all responses was that of the disciples. The disciples, again sailing on a violently surging sea, encountered what they supposed was a ghost (see Mark 6:47-52). What they actually “**saw**” was Jesus “walking on the sea” (v. 48). Their fear of Jesus and the astonishment, with which they greeted Jesus' miracle of calming the sea, brought a stinging rebuke from Mark the author. Mark informs the reader that the heart of the disciples “was hardened” and therefore they lacked “**understanding**”—their faith was insufficient (v. 52).

In contrast to the disciples, a Gentile woman came and “fell at Jesus' feet” after “**hearing** about Jesus” (Mark 7:25). She persisted in requesting that Jesus “cast the demon out of her daughter” (v. 26). This bold faith initiated a gracious reply from Jesus: “Go; the demon has gone out of your daughter” (v. 29).

Finally, as Jesus was traveling toward Jerusalem at the conclusion of his ministry, Bartimaeus, a blind man, “**heard** that it was Jesus the Nazarene” who was passing by. When Jesus had him called, Bartimaeus “jumped up and came to Jesus” (v. 50). As Jesus

declared that Bartimaeus' "faith" had made him well, he "regained his sight" and "began following Jesus" (v. 52).

In Jesus' first set of parables, He admonished His people, "He who has ears to **hear**, let him **hear**" (Mark 4:9). And, to the same group, He pronounced, "**see** what you **hear**" (v. 23). But seeing and hearing did not always create an understanding which resulted in faith. Nevertheless, when people did respond to Jesus with seeing and hearing in faith, miraculous things took place. This admonition to see and hear in faith, however, is not solely for the people of Jesus' day. It is for present day readers as well. Mark exhorts persons today, "Let the reader **understand**" (Mark 13:14). Thus, if the reader understands when he sees and hears Jesus' message in the gospel of Mark, he will, as Paul urges in Romans 1:17, "live by faith."