

Puzzles in Mark

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LEE'S SUMMIT, Mo.—Here are some puzzling passages from Mark's Gospel. I invite everyone to consider these and offer your comments.

Puzzle #1

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 even go into the village."

Why did it take Jesus two attempts to heal the blind man? Why was he only partially successful the first time? And why did he spit into the man's eyes?

Puzzle #2

Mark 9:17-21—A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not."

"You unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me." So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.

Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?"

"From childhood," he answered.

Here are my questions. Jesus asked, "How long has he been like this?" Why did Jesus have to ask this? One might think He should already know this. Did He not know?

Puzzle #3

Mark 10:46-52—As Jesus and His disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means "son of Timaeus"),

was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you." Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him.

The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see."

"Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

First, why did Jesus ask the man what he wanted done for him? He was clearly blind, and, in any case, shouldn't he have known? And, second, why did he just say "Go, your faith has made you whole"? Why didn't he go through the ritual, as he did Mark 8, of mixing saliva with the laying on of hands? What's the difference here?