

I Think I See, Therefore I See, Right?

With a Gospel reading this long, there are many preachable points that can be found here. We could really stay within this chapter from John's Gospel account and craft several sermons without making too many references to other Scripture passages. However, if we do this, then we would miss some important concepts. So today, we will look at the issue of blindness that is prevalent in this Gospel text and see how it ties in with the rest of John's Gospel account, especially the last two stories about Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman at the well.

The obvious issue throughout this chapter is blindness, both physical and spiritual blindness. The apostles asked Jesus if a man born blind at birth was blind because of that man's sin or his parents' sin. In this question, they expressed the belief at that time that a physical ailment was the punishment for one's sin. This attitude is still evident today as we hear of people who question why something bad happened to them as if they are being punished for doing something wrong. "I must have been bad if I have this sickness" is the usual sentiment expressed when someone gets sick. Jesus quickly debunks this attitude. However, we must not go to the other extreme and say that God did it to us so that God can make it right. Sometimes, life happens and we find ourselves in those dark 'valleys of the shadow of death'. At the end of this chapter, Jesus has switched the focus from a physical blindness to a spiritual blindness.

But this raises the question of what is spiritual blindness? In other words, do we believe what we see or do we see because of what we believe? For example, some people would say that they were 'lucky' when, for example, they were able to avoid a car accident while others would say that they were blessed that the accident did not

happen. Or, in the imagery of the 23rd Psalm do we see the rod and staff of our Lord as protection from the evil that may befall or us or do we see them as things that the Lord uses to limit what we do, to keep us under control?

So, a logical question to ask is what is it that the Pharisees are seeing? Their way in which they question the man and his parents, it is obvious that what they see is the law and whether or not Jesus followed the law. It was in not following the law that they perceived that Jesus cannot be from God. The second exchange between the Pharisees and the blind man reminded me of the geometry proofs from high school. Basically, if you started with a known fact, then certain things follow from those facts. In this case, the Pharisees knew the truth that in order to perform a miracle, a person must be from God. However, they could not get past their 'truth' that a person from God will follow the law to the letter. They then relied on their other 'truth' (the one that the apostles voiced at the beginning of the chapter) that a person with an ailment like blindness had to have sinned, so they concluded that they could not learn anything from this man and whatever he said could not be true, so they drove him out.

This exchange and the 'truths' which the Pharisees based their argument were faulty. If you start with something that is not true, then the rest of your arguments will lead you further away from the truth. While it is true that one must follow the law, it is also true, which we see in Mark's Gospel account that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. This puts the law under the actions of God. We could say that the truth of helping another person is higher than the truth of the need to follow the law. This is why in chapter 3 of John's Gospel account, Jesus concluded His conversation with Nicodemus by saying that the Son of God was sent to save the world and not judge the world.

When we consider the Gospel readings from the last 3 weeks, we see Jesus in conversation with people. In Chapter 3, we see Jesus in conversation with Nicodemus, a Pharisee, one of the 'elites' who was a teacher of the people. In Chapter 4, Jesus is in conversation with a Samaritan woman, an 'outsider' on several levels. Today, in Chapter 9, Jesus is in conversation with a blind man, someone who is on the fringes of society. In each of these instances, each of these people come to believe in Jesus as the Messiah. Together, they show us that there is no one path to believing in Jesus. Jesus met each of them where they were, in the circumstances of life in which they are in. If Jesus approached the blind man or the Samaritan woman in the same way in which He talked with Nicodemus, then the results would not have been the same. Jesus gave each of the 3 what they needed, when they needed it. Sometimes, a seed is planted in our minds that needs time to germinate and it is at some time later that it grows. As is the case with Nicodemus, an appeal to his intellect planted the seed with the result that Nicodemus came to believe in Jesus. Sometimes, Jesus comes as He did to the Samaritan woman, letting her know things that no one else would know, some dark secret, some hidden yearning, desire or fear that she may have had and assured her that she was not to be judged by that. Sometimes, like the blind man, we are touched directly and a miracle happens that can only be attributed to Jesus intervening in our lives. The Good News, the Gospel is that Jesus cared for each one of them.

The same is true for us - Jesus comes to us as we need Him. Jesus meets us in and through the circumstances that we are in at that time. If we need Jesus to come 'rescue' us at different times, Jesus will come in the way that is best for us, a way that fits the circumstances that we are in. What does not change is the love that Jesus has for us. As we continue our Lenten journey, let us remember that

whether we are in those green pastures, beside the still waters or even in the valley of the shadow of death, the Good News is that Jesus is there with us, guiding us, leading us, helping us in the way in which He knows best.

YouTube links:

Gospel and Sermon: <https://youtu.be/UuOoRfrAjj0>

Service: <https://youtu.be/EGQFKTnESGM>