

READING GOD

John 9

Can you read this paragraph?

Accdrnig to rscheearrch at Cmabrigde Uinervtisy, it deosn't matter in what order the ltteers in a word are, the only iprmoetnt thing is that the frist and lsat ltteer be at the rghit pclae. The rset can be a total mses and you can still raed it wouthit a porbelm. This is bcuseae then human mind deos not raed ervey lteter, but the word as a wlohe.

Amzanig huh?

Seeing is not just a matter of our eyes. It is what we do with what our eyes take into our brains. Think of an official's call at a basketball game. The call is "good" or "bad" depending on whether or not it helps our team. A police car's lights are good when my car is stalled and bad when I'm 5 miles over the speed limit. A tax break is good when I pay a lot of taxes and bad when it jeopardizes the assistance I get for tuition from the government or when my job depends on that tax revenue. So how do we "see" God?

The Jewish religious leaders that Jesus encountered in John 9 saw God as good to the good and bad news to the bad. The reason they had wealth and prosperity was because they followed God's law and deserved His blessing. The reason the blind man was blind and that other people had disabilities and sickness, poverty, and hard lives was because they or their parents were bad and God was justly punishing them for that evil. The religious leaders were a lot like Job's friends. They were convinced that the reason Job suffered is because He must have done something wrong. They "read" God that way because it assured them of having the God they wanted—a God who would bless them according to their standards.

Melanie is a middle-aged woman who "read" God a lot differently. Melanie wanted to be a mother. She didn't marry until she was in her 30's, so to beat the biological clock she and her husband immediately tried to have a baby. After three years with no success they discovered that because of a medical condition, they would probably never have a child. But remarkably, she got pregnant. She thought it was a miracle. Her pregnancy went forward with no complications, but in delivery the umbilical chord wrapped around the child's neck and choked her to death. Why would God allow them such great joy only to take it away? Relatives of those killed in the Turkish-Syrian earthquakes are asking, "Why God?" They read God the way Job did, that God doesn't care.

But how do we read God? The Jewish leaders and Job's friends saw that their prosperity came from God. Job and Melanie and victims of war, injustice, and poverty see evil from God. But so often we see nothing from God. We are blind to God, not because God isn't there, but because we have everything else on our minds. We become blind, not because like the blind

man Jesus healed we can't see or because like the Jewish leaders we want to see God our way, but often because we don't bother looking.

Norman Lear, the famous television producer who made "All in the Family" and other comedies, wrote about his fear of our culture's lack of attention span. He blamed it on TV commercials that interrupt our thoughts every 6-10 minutes. We often lose the capacity to concentrate on reading a book or studying for extended periods of time.

With all the things that distract us every day, it can be hard for us to concentrate and "read" God. Christian writer Max Lucado talks about when we experience a simple blessing like the sight of the first spring bulb or the feel of the warm rays of sun. He urges that then we need to "be speechless and remain that way. Say nothing and listen as heaven whispers, 'Do you like it? I did it just for you.'" But so often there are too many interruptions as we go on to the next thing in life. God's there, but we don't bother to "read" Him.

But the man born blind did "read" God. The man who could not see, did see. How? Jesus said, "For judgment I have come to this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." The way to "read" God is not through wealth, intelligence, common sense, or education. It is through Jesus Christ. The man could not see, but he looked to Jesus in faith. The blind man obeyed when Jesus told him to wash the mud Jesus put on his eyes. Then he could see! But as much as he was healed from physical blindness, even more before that we were put right with God. He could "read" God. That's why, unlike the Jewish leaders, the man could see that Jesus was from God and believe when Jesus told him that Jesus is God.

The Jewish leaders couldn't see that, not because they were ignorant or couldn't see the evidence of this healed man right in front of their faces. To accept Jesus meant that they would have to admit that they weren't "good" and deserving of God's blessings. They could "read" a God that they wanted Him to be. All that they had built up about following all those laws and being better than other people would have to be thrown away to accept Jesus.

And we can't "read" God in Jesus when we demand to know why. We want our answers from God and we fail to see the answer He gives us in Jesus. The disciples tried to explain the man's blindness as the Jewish leaders and Job's friend did by asking, "Did this man sin or did his parents?" Notice how Jesus answered them. Actually He didn't answer them except to say "no" to their explanation. Instead He said, "The works of God will be revealed in this man." Jesus pointed away from the "why" question to Himself. What we "read" in Jesus is what the blind man read. In Jesus we see a God who doesn't answer our "why" questions the way we want Him to, but gives us a better answer—eternal life with him in Christ. We don't know why Melanie lost her baby as Job didn't know why he suffered, but in Jesus we see life beyond all the suffering and pain.

We can't "read" God when we aren't looking. But God in Jesus puts Himself into our world. He "interrupts" the "commercials" in life to help us want to really see and "read" what God offers to us. Just as Jesus approached the blind man, He came to our lives. He said, "I am

the light of the world.” In the midst of our dark world, He shines. We may be distracted by all kinds of lights—wanting to succeed, be happy, to have enough “stuff” in life. But those only lead to the darkness of death. Jesus has come to shine so we can “read” God.

If we are asked to draw a picture of a person’s face, we normally put the eyes near the top, the nose in the middle, and the mouth below. Actually if you take your fingers and measure down the front of your head, you will notice that our eyes are all at least halfway down, not at the top. We look at faces every day, including our own in the mirror. But our brains “read” that when we draw a face the eyes should be at the top.

So it is with our attempts to “read” life and God. We get it wrong either by building a God who rewards us like the Jewish leaders did, a God who is unjust like Job did, or not bothering to “read” God much at all. But Jesus has come to give us the right “read” on God, where instead of trying to “read” God according to what we think is right, we trust in Him as that blind man trusted in Jesus.