

BLIND OR SEEING?

John 9



Are these two people's faces sharing an intimate moment, or is it a fancy cup? It is a matter of perspective—seeing the same thing, but seeing it in two different ways.

In our text the same Jesus appears both to a blind man and to the Pharisees. The man is healed and sees Jesus to be from God. The Pharisees see it otherwise because Jesus healed on the Sabbath, the day of rest. The Pharisees' attitude about Jesus is expressed this way:

The man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath . . . We know this man (Jesus) is a sinner . . . We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from!

The blind man, on the other hand, says this:

He (Jesus) is a prophet . . . Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing, I do know, I was blind, but now I see! . . . I have told you already, and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too? . . . Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opens my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does His will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not sent from God, he could do nothing.

What perspective do you have in life? How do you view this?



It might be obvious to us that this is a cross, the symbol of the Christian faith. And it is only smart, as Jesus told us in John 3:16, to believe in Jesus so that we have eternal life. But are we really looking at the cross?

Jesus tells the former blind man and some of the Pharisees, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." It really doesn't matter in our daily lives if we believe if the sun goes around the earth and not vice versa or that the earth is flat, not round. But it does matter what perspective we have about Jesus. Either we see Him as the blind man did or as the Pharisees.

So how could we ever not see Him as the blind man did? How could we be so foolish as to doubt Jesus? We can when we look from our positions as humans. The Pharisees were so focused on keeping the Sabbath that they didn't care about the good of having blind man healed. We get so focused on getting good grades or making more money or enjoying what we can see on a screen that we fail to see the good of how God heals us from spiritual blindness. For us as sinful humans it cannot make sense to limit sexual relations to one man and one woman in marriage or to say the value of a person's life comes from God, not his/her value to society, or to give when others are not giving, or to be more concerned about love than "fairness."

The German writer Goethe used the words of Jesus about it being worse to gain the whole world and lose one's soul as the basis of his book Faust. The book is about a man, who though brilliant, makes the choice to give us God for everything else. He learns the hard way the foolishness of his choice.

So it is to see things our way, rather than God's, to, as Jesus told the Pharisees, "To see and become blind"?

So are we the blind man who could see or the seeing Pharisees who became blind? What do we see in the cross? Yes, it is the symbol of Jesus. Many of us wear crosses. But do we see the cross as the way it did to people in Jesus' time? Is it the symbol of shame and suffering?

In the early church Christians had to be careful using the sign of the cross because of persecution. Then when Christianity became legal in the Roman Empire Christians began to wear crosses that were empty. In the early 400's a wooden door on the new Santa Sabina Basilica was carved with this picture:



We see Jesus on the cross with the two criminals. But there are no crosses. Later pictures show Jesus on a cross, but in a serene state. Then in the 900's, Gero, archbishop of Cologne, commissioned a crucifix with Jesus suffering. Many Protestant churches got away from having crucifixes because they thought it was showing Jesus as an image. But in traditional Lutheran churches crucifixes are common because of the importance of what happened on the cross.

We need the perspective of seeing the cross and seeing it with Jesus suffering on it. With that perspective we see just how serious our sin is. Then we can see even more just how serious God is about saving us from that sin. The blind man had that perspective because he was blind. He knew his life was a wreck. All he could do was trust completely in God's mercy. And he could see. The cross helps us to see our helplessness so we can clearly see all that Jesus did for us on that cross.

I remember my father recited this poem by Edward Rowland Sill called “Opportunity.”

This I beheld, or dreamed it in a dream: —
There spread a cloud of dust along a plain;
And underneath the cloud, or in it, raged
A furious battle, and men yelled, and swords
Shocked upon swords and shields. A prince’s banner
Wavered, then staggered backward, hemmed by foes.

A craven hung along the battle’s edge,
And thought, “Had I a sword of keener steel —
That blue blade that the king’s son bears, — but this
Blunt thing!” — he snapt and flung it from his hand,
And lowering crept away and left the field.

Then came the king’s son, wounded, sore bestead,
And weaponless, and saw the broken sword,
Hilt-buried in the dry and trodden sand,
And ran and snatched it, and with battle-shout
Lifted afresh, he hewed his enemy down,
And saved a great cause that heroic day.

In the poem there are two different ways of seeing the sword. To the craven (a coward) it is a piece of junk. To the prince it is a weapon of victory.

How do we see the cross of Jesus? It is not just a matter of positive thinking. Either the cross is the awful means of how Jesus died or it is something we have to throw away and reject. Either it opens our eyes to see the reality of our sin and then the even greater reality of God’s love. Or is it something that we have to be blind to and remove from our sight.