

Sermon – 19/06/2005 am

Blind Pharisees 1

Study Text: John 9:13-23

In a book entitled 'I dared to call him Father' Bilquis Sheik tells of how she came to believe in Jesus Christ. She belonged to a rich family in Pakistan. She writes of having had a vision which moved her to search for the truth about Jesus Christ. She found a Bible, read about Jesus and believed in him. She wanted to be baptized according to what she had read. She went along to a church in the city where she lived.

But they were not prepared to baptize her. Why not? The church is small in Pakistan and Christians are oppressed. Out of fear for what might happen to them they refused to baptize this person as a new believer in Jesus Christ. There are probably churches here also that would not have baptized her. They would say 'we do not believe that you had a vision from God'. 'We are a reformed church and our doctrines do not allow for God to reveal himself in visions or dreams'. Pharisaism is not dead.

What a vivid contrast we see in this passage between the learned Pharisees and the poor, uneducated man whose eyes were opened by Jesus. This man who sat by the roadside begging all his life was brought before the religious leaders of the nation, the highest council of the Jews. With all their knowledge of the Scriptures and the teachings and traditions of men they interrogated him. But all to no avail. He would not deny the truth in order to comply with the teaching of men.

The man born blind went and washed in the pool of Siloam as Jesus told him. He came back seeing. The local people brought him to the Pharisees, the religious leaders. Why they did this we are not told. Maybe they wanted verification or an explanation of this miracle from the experts in the law. They received neither.

I am the light of the world said Jesus. This is the lesson we learn from this miracle. Jesus healed him to reveal the works of God. How wonderful, how amazing that this man born blind could not see! The disciples returned with joy after seeing the power of God revealed in healing the sick and casting out demons (Luke 10:17). When Jesus gave Bartimaeus back his sight he glorified God and all the people gave praise to God (Luke 18:43).

We might have expected some rejoicing when this man born blind was healed – but no. His healing was met with scepticism and unbelief- and that especially in the house of God. No wonder Jesus called these religious leaders blind guides. *Blind guides you strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish that the outside of them may be clean also* (Matthew 23:24f).

The Sabbath

It was a Sabbath when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes (9:14). On two counts Jesus had broken the Sabbath according to the regulations they had added to the Sabbath. To make clay was prohibited, as was healing that was not life saving. Adding to the word of God led these Jews to make a fundamental error of judgment.

This man is not from God for he does not keep the Sabbath. Some of these experts (not all) presumed to judge this man who opened the beggar's eyes. They would judge whether he was from God or not. Jesus had already told them that the Father *has committed all judgment to the Son (5:22)*. Here were these bold but blind men judging the very Judge whom God has sent into the world.

How did they come to this judgment? At this first interrogation they had asked the man how he received his sight and he told them. He did not mention the name of Jesus as he did to the local people but they knew who he meant. His testimony was again the simple facts – *he put clay on my eyes, I washed and I see*. The inspired writer has already informed the reader that it was a Sabbath when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes.

From reading this gospel some might think that Jesus only healed on the Sabbath – but that would be a mistake. He did many other signs that are not recorded in this book (20:30). These are recorded because of the teaching that flows from them. These are recorded *that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God*.

The Pharisees had made the Sabbath the touchstone of righteousness. 'He does not keep the Sabbath so he cannot be from God' they said. All too often we see men putting up such touchstones by which they judge others. Some people we knew in India would not accept a person who smoked as a true Christian. Others will say 'If she was really a Christian she would not wear make up'.

There are some who say you must keep Saturday as the Sabbath if you truly believe. We have those who judge others for not keeping the Sabbath as they determine it should be kept – just like the Pharisees. *Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls* (Romans 14:3).

Sadly men still presume to judge others, usurping the role of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us beware of judging others.

Signs and Sinners

Not all the Jewish Council were so bold and so blind. There was a division among them. Some knew they could not deny the truth, the undeniable fact that this man could now see. This man testified that his eyes had been miraculously opened and that Jesus was behind it. Their colleagues had labelled Jesus a sinner so the question arose – *How can a man who is a sinner do such signs* (9:16). Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea and Gamaliel may well have been in this group.

A sinner performing miracles, a miracle of healing, an unheard of miracle, was beyond their comprehension. Satan and his agents can of course counterfeit miracles, but they could not entertain such a proposition in this case. This great work must have been done by the power of God – but what about the man who put the clay in his eyes and told him to go and wash? How could he be called a sinner? The question was left hanging.

God cannot lie. Jesus is the truth. You cannot say you believe in God while denying the truth. You can believe in other gods and deny reality, for they are not concerned with the truth. But we cannot believe in the God who is truth itself while denying the truth.

Many people see a conflict between God and science. They try to find scientific errors in God's word. They say the teaching that God created the universe and everything in it is not scientific. But when the theories which men have developed are peeled away and the facts are revealed it becomes clear that the Bible does not deny the facts of science. Belief in God is not blind faith; it is belief that upholds all truth.

He Is a Prophet

The majority group could not answer the question raised by the few less bold and blind members of the Council. *There was a division among them.* The experts were stumped. Blinded by legalism they could not see a way to reconcile their teaching with the facts. So they turned to the poor man again and asked for his opinion about Jesus.

I am reminded of the time when a truck with a high load got stuck as it went under a bridge. It was wedged so tightly that the driver could not go forward or back. The police were called but could do nothing, then the fire brigade and the SES but to no avail- the truck would not budge. Engineers were called in and they considered dismantling part of the bridge. A small boy walking past asked what was the problem. 'Why don't you let the air out of the tyres ,' he said.

The poor man said *He is a prophet.* The religious leaders were in the dark but not this man. A prophet is sent by God to do the works of God. Moses was a prophet. This was not the answer they wanted to hear. They would not reconsider their judgment about Jesus. Pride fuelled their spiritual blindness. As they sunk deeper into darkness they sought to deny the fact of this healing. The poor man offered them light but they would not humble themselves. *Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and he will lift you up* (James 4:10, Matthew 23:12).

Parents Called

Someone had the bright idea to call the man's parents. 'They should know if he was born blind. They should know how his eyes were opened'. Maybe they hoped to intimidate them into saying what they wanted to hear. They were getting no where with the man himself. They were taking a risk of course. If the parents corroborated their son's story the Jews would be even further down the path of blindness.

Though intimidated the parents did not deny their son was born blind. They did not admit to knowing how he came to be able to see – even if they did know. They passed the buck, as it were,

to their own son. *He is of age, ask him.* They knew that to endorse the name of Jesus in any way would get them thrown out of the synagogue. Their son knew this also but did not fear the Jews like his parents.

In this first interrogation we see the danger of making judgments based on the doctrines of men. These proud religious leaders would not reconsider their judgment even when the facts were against them. Of course if you hold to Gods word without adding to it you will not come into conflict with the facts.

They chose to press on in their blindness. The poor man on the other hand was moving toward the light. The man who opened his eyes he saw as a prophet. Soon he would see him as the Son of God.

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon