

Sermon – 26/06/2005 am

Blind Pharisees 2

Study Text: John 9:25-34

The teacher was working through a long mathematical problem on the board but came out with the wrong answer. She had made a mistake in the calculation. She told the class that the text book must be wrong, not prepared to concede that her answer might be wrong. One of the students raised his hand and pointed out the mistake in her calculations. She got angry and told him to leave the room. Can you imagine such a thing happening?

For a second time the Pharisees called the man whose eyes Jesus had opened and interrogated him. Interrogation of his parents had not helped them. They wanted someone to say that this man was not born blind. They wanted to show that some deception was being perpetrated, that someone was pulling the wool over their eyes. But no false witness would come forward.

They had to turn back to the man himself and by interrogation get him to deny that Jesus played a central role in his healing. This time they questioned him under oath – *give God the glory. We know this man is a sinner* they said (9:24). Some scholars think these words mean they wanted him to give the glory to God and not to Jesus for the miracle. But it is more likely that they meant ‘Now you must speak the truth and nothing but the truth – you stand before God’ (cf Joshua 7:19).

Within months this same Council would be interrogating Jesus, the Son of God himself – again with the same piety. *I put you under oath by the living God* the High Priest said (Matthew 26:63). Legalists can be so pious! Those who lack support in truth often hide behind the veil of piety.

The Pharisees loved to parade before men with their broad phylacteries and long tassels on their prayer shawls. For a pretence they made long prayers (Matthew 23:14). As truth decreases such piety increases. It can be seen in the church down through history and still today.

Oath or no oath the poor man kept on testifying to the truth. He was not going to judge Jesus as these Jews were so quick and eager to do. Their blindness was highlighted by the brilliant light of this one man’s testimony. He knew what Jesus had done for him. He was no expert in the law, he was no theologian, and he did not have all the answers, but one thing he did know. And that thing was that his life had been changed. *Once I was blind but now I see*. The teachers of the law were about to get a theological lesson from an uneducated beggar.

This man illustrates the truth of what we read in I Corinthians. *God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things that are mighty* (I Corinthians 1:27). Are you ready to be a fool for Christ? Are you ready to be a faithful witness for Jesus Christ like this man? Will you cling to the truth about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, even when all around you people deny the truth?

Motives Exposed

How were your eyes opened they asked him previously (5:15). *He (Jesus) put clay on my eyes and I washed and I see.* It was all very clear and straightforward, except to those who did not want to believe it. They asked again *what did he do to you, how did he open your eyes (9:26)?* The poor man began to suspect their motives in questioning him. Why were they asking the same things again?

His reply was terse and taunting. He asked if they wanted to become disciples of Jesus like him. He may have been genuine but more likely he was being sarcastic. He knew how much the Pharisees hated Jesus – they called Jesus a sinner and wanted to kill him. This man however was a disciple of Jesus. The more they provoked him to hate Jesus the more he came to love him.

The Pharisees were not impressed with his sarcastic question. They gave up questioning him and turned to reviling the poor man. They could not see clearly despite the light that was shining in their midst – Jesus the light of the world. They retreated to tradition hoping to find some light there. Moses we know, or so they claimed. *We are Moses' disciples* they proudly declared.

But they did not really know Moses either. God did speak to Moses but they had added to those words. It was this fundamental mistake of adding to the word of God that had led them into the darkness in which they were now walking. Indeed Moses had spoken about Jesus. Through Moses God promised another prophet like Moses saying *him you shall hear* (Deuteronomy 18:15).

We must be alert to arguments based on traditions, arguments that lead God's people into the dark rather than the light. The Church of Rome gives the same recognition to tradition as it does Holy Scripture – and it is not the only church that does so. It is so easy for tradition to accumulate, to build up and slowly encrust a church.

If you have ever lived with bore water as your water supply you will be familiar with the salt that gets deposited in the bottom of the kettle. Slowly it builds up inside the kettle until it is very hard for the heat to get through and boil the water. I used to get a hammer and chisel to chip away this layer from time to time.

As for this fellow we do not know where he is from (9:29). They were so incensed and blinded by hatred towards Jesus they would not even mention his name. Even as they tried to give their hatred and reviling some theological basis they admitted their blindness. As the Psalmist said *surely the wrath of man shall praise you* (Psalm 76:10).

Even though Jesus had told them clearly and repeatedly where he was from, they would not listen. Even though many from the crowd accepted Jesus as the Christ; even though one of their own, Nicodemus, had cautioned against blind judgment (7:51); even though this poor beggar stood before them as a living witness to the divine power Jesus exercised – still they would not see.

Lesson Given

The uneducated beggar turns to them in dismay. He had been brought to the religious leaders in the hope that they might shed some light upon the matter of how his eyes were opened. It was left to the beggar himself to do this. He was not blinded by tradition or the doctrines of men.

His reasoning was simple. He stared with the undeniable fact that his eyes were opened. Such a miracle, a mighty work that had never even been heard of before must surely be the work of God he argued – and few would disagree with this point. This being so, how then could the man who anointed his eyes and told him to wash be an ungodly sinner? *If this man were not from God he could do nothing.* God is not going to let a sinner take the credit for his mighty work.

The Pharisees could not contend with his theology. It was straight from the Scriptures. They knew that whoever did such a miracle must be from God. That is why they tried to deny the miracle or to distance Jesus from any involvement in it. But they could not get evidence to do this. Now they were confronted by theology they knew they could not contradict. This man left them with no room to wriggle away – as some theologians love to do.

Many have tried to wriggle away from the clear teaching of Gods word. Liberal theologians are very adept at this. Ecumenical theologians are very adept at this. It is interesting to read some of the papers being presented at the ongoing discussions between the Church of Rome and Protestant churches.

The Reformers were well aware of the ability of men to wriggle away from the clear teaching of Scripture. We appreciate the very tight formulation of doctrine that we have in the Westminster Confession of Faith.

Thrown Out

The proud and worldly wise were put to shame by one they regarded as a sinner and a fool (I Corinthians 1:27). ‘Are you teaching us you sinner’ they said. *You were completely born in sin* they said, contradicting the words of Jesus when he first found this blind beggar (9:3). Theological debate gave way to further reviling, personal abuse and excommunication.

Again we read of the widespread use of excommunication in the dark days of the medieval church. Where theology failed, the church and its rules took over. Being cast out of the synagogue was what his parents feared, but this man had no such fear. He had chosen to witness with boldness what he knew to be the truth about Jesus Christ. As we will see Jesus did not fail him.

He was cast out by men but not by Jesus. ‘Let the child of God console himself with the thought that there is a true church out of which no man can cast him. He only is blessed whom Christ called blessed; and he only is accursed whom Christ shall pronounce accursed at the last day’ (J.C. Ryle).

What a wonderful testimony we have in this man. Will you stand firm like him in the face of ridicule and reviling, excommunication, persecution or imprisonment?

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