

INTRODUCTION

In our sermons for the past few Sundays we covered a few topics on basic doctrines and church life. From today to the end of the year I will resume a series on the life and teaching of Jesus that I preached in my former church. But we will still do special things on special days like the Christmas. Our sermon title for today is “Jesus the Eye-Opener.” We have a Chinese saying: “If I can see it, then I know it is real.” Really? Let’s look at a few pictures to test how reliable our eyes really are. When you share the gospel with others a common reaction you may get is: “If I can see God with my eyes then I will believe Him.” Perhaps think so too! But the problem is not with your eyes, the problem is with your heart. In John chapter 9 there are some people who were not fooled by their physical eyes, but they were fooled by their spiritual eyes. In the story, Jesus healed a man who was born-blind. By healing this man, Jesus pointed out the spiritual blindness in people’s hearts. We will look at three groups of people in the story: the patient, his parents and the Pharisees. As we study their characteristics you need to ask which of them you can identify yourself with. Their different responses to the healing reveal their heart conditions. Jesus treated the blind man for a reason. Through the miracle, Jesus told us that He came to restore our spiritual vision.

EXPLANATION

1. 拒絕改變 Resist Change

We will study the parents first, then the Pharisees and lastly the patient. The patient’s parents represent people who resist change. After the blind man was healed the Pharisees rolled out an investigation to see what had happened. They were the religious leaders in those days. The group came to an initial assumption that perhaps the patient were not blind after all. So they summoned his parents as witnesses. The parents testified in **verses 20-21**: 20 “We know he is our son,” the parents answered, “and we know he was born blind. 21 But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don’t know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself.” The parents verified that the patient was indeed their son. However, they refused to say how he was healed. Did they really not know? People should explain to them why the Pharisees wanted to see them: “Hey, know what? A man named Jesus made your blind son see again.” The parents were sneaky in their answer. They told the Pharisees that their son was “of age; he will speak for himself.” At that time, when a Jewish boy reached 13 he would be considered an adult and could testify for himself in court. The **next verse** tells us the true reason behind the parents’ reply: His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for already the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue. The parents were concerned that they would be kicked out of the synagogue. Nowadays we have many churches to choose from. But in those days there might only be one synagogue in a village. Also, being expelled from a synagogue means that this family would be isolated from the community. The parents clearly witnessed God’s power at work in their son but they resisted the change to get close to Jesus. When Jesus came He challenged people to change. Once a wealthy young ruler asked Jesus how to inherit eternal life. He proudly said that he had been following God’s

commandments since a kid. Jesus then ordered the man: “Sell all that you have and come follow me.” Remember the young man’s reaction? He walked away with a sad face. He loved his money more than God. I have seen too many people who resist change to follow Jesus. They think that the gospel is a good thing. But the cost to follow Jesus is too great. They are afraid that their work or promotion may be affected. “I will come to the church after I retire,” they say. Some people may not want to offend their non-believing spouse. How to help people who resist change? Let us think of an analogy: if you see a toddler banging a TV remote on the coffee-table how do you get the device back? If you snatch it away by force he/she will definitely cry. A smart parent would use a toy to exchange for the remote control. The kiddo will drop the gadget and grab what it is in your hand. Similarly, when we reach out to people with the gospel we invite them to let go of what they have and receive the best blessing only God can provide. If we keep on saying all the negatives about Buddhism or materialism, that cohabitation is immoral, and smoking is bad for their health we may generate greater resistance in their hearts. Instead, we can invite them: “Come to the church and study the Bible with us, or come to my home for dinner. See for yourself what Christian life is all about.” When they witness how we treat each other with God’s love and honesty they will be willing to drop their “remote control” and respond: “I want what you have.” That brings me to an important point. When non-believing friends come to our church do they only hear us comparing what “remote control” we have? There is nothing wrong to talk about our professions, interests and the school our kids attend. But do seeker friends hear us share how God works in our lives at all? If not, then they may conclude that Christians are just ordinary people who have a weekend hobby of going to church.

2. 否定真理 Reject Truth

Jesus came to restore our spiritual vision. The parents resisted change to have any relationship with Jesus. Whereas, the Pharisees rejected the truth that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah (or Savior) promised in the Old Testament. They were upset because Jesus performed the miracle on a Sabbath. Sabbath falls on the Saturdays. According to the Old Testament Law Jews were forbidden to perform any work on Sabbath. The Pharisees created some specific guidelines to define what “work” is. To them, healing is a kind of work. After the patient shared his testimony about how Jesus healed him there was a disagreement among the Pharisees. **Verse 16** tells us: Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” But others asked, “How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?” So they were divided. Some people in the group condemned Jesus to be a sinner because He violated the Sabbath. To them a good thing that was not done in their way was still a bad thing. Jesus deliberately picked a Sabbath to carry out the healing in order to expose the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. He pointed out their spiritual blindness in **verse 41**: Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.” The Pharisees rejected the truth that Jesus was from God. They were blinded by their man-made rules. Paul also told us in **2 Corinthians 4:4** - The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. Satan is “the god of this age.” He uses various ways to blind people’s heart, and causes them to reject the truth. For example, some people are too busy pursuing their careers that they do not have any spare time to ponder on eternal things. Others may reject the Biblical truth because it contradicts with their traditional beliefs. Atheists cannot accept the existence of a Creator. Some other people may find the idea of a God became a man and died on the cross simply absurd. How can we help people who reject

the truth? Ultimately it is God who shines light into our hearts. Besides praying for non-believing people we should also encourage them to keep an objective mind for truth. Christian author Lee Strobel is a person like that. His book “The Case for Christ” is a recap of how he changed from an atheist to a Christian. Strobel used to work as a newspaper journalist. He was quite mad when his wife accepted Christ. He loved his wife but he could not tolerate the fact that they now had very different worldviews. Strobel thought the only way to “save” his wife was to prove that what she believed was false. He said to himself: “The only way to truth is through facts.” Through the encouragement of a fellow reporter Strobel initiated a comprehensive investigation into the Christian beliefs. Strobel tackled the core doctrine of Christianity – Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. He reasoned that if he could refute that Jesus rose after He died on the cross then Christianity would crumble. Some of you know how Strobel’s inquiry ended. Undeniable facts led him to the truth. If Jesus did return to life after death then there could be no other explanation but that Jesus is God. Finally, Strobel became a believer too. Later, he quit his job and served as a full-time evangelist. We can encourage people who reject the truth to check it out for themselves to see if the Bible is true, just like Strobel did. Take away all preconceived notions about God and just be objective. Let God speak for Himself. People then need to make a decision whether to accept or reject the truth. We should not be superstitious. But one should not make his/her disbelief a superstition either.

3. 接受恩典 Receive Grace

Jesus came to restore our spiritual vision. The parents resisted any change to get to know who Jesus was. The Pharisees completely rejected the truth that Jesus was the Christ. Compare to the two groups of people the patient in the story humbly received the grace Jesus gave to him. Jesus smeared mud on the blind man’s eyes, then Jesus told him to wash the mud away. He obeyed Jesus, and his eye-sight was recovered. His action verified his faith in Jesus. When the religious leaders tried to force the patient to agree that Jesus was a sinner the patient responded in **verse 25**: He replied, “Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!” He did not know how the healing occurred or who Jesus really was. But there was a transformation in his body that he could not deny – “I was blind but now I see!” Every Christian should have the same testimony. You do not need to know a lot of Bible verses before you can share the gospel to others. Just share your personal testimony. Tell people how Jesus changed your life. For example, may be you used to be a self-centered person, or you indulged in the pleasure of this world, or you have a low self-esteem, etc. Then God sent a Christian to share the gospel with you. You received God’s grace and became a new person. As a result, you find opportunity to help people in need, or you spare your time to participate in church ministries, or you are confident that God loves you. “I was blind but now I see!” This patient could even boldly testify before the religious leaders. Physical healing was just the beginning of his pursuit of truth. We can see in the story that his understanding of Jesus gradually grew. He told people in **verse 11**: “The man they call Jesus...” The patient only knew Jesus by His name. Then he claimed in **verse 17**: ...“He is a prophet.” He thought that since Jesus could perform miracles, He might be like one of the Old Testament prophets who had supernatural power. Then look at **verse 31**: “We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will.” The patient perceived Jesus as a righteous man whose prayer God answered. Toward the end the Pharisees could not gain any support from the patient to persecute Jesus. So they kicked the man out. The story could have ended there. But Jesus came back to look for the man. Jesus

did not only want to heal his physical blindness. Jesus wanted the man to receive salvation grace too. Listen to their dialogue in **verses 35-36**: 35 Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” 36 “Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him.” The title “the Son of Man” points out that Jesus is the revelation of God in the form of a man. Jesus invited the patient: “Will you put your trust in me?” The man made a decision in **verse 38**: Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him. The man admitted that Jesus was the Son of Man by faith. Previously in verse 36 the patient addressed Jesus as “sir.” Now the man called Jesus “Lord.” Then he worshipped Jesus, meaning that he bowed down before Jesus. We cannot assume that the man already had full knowledge that Jesus was the Christ and Savior. However, we need to understand that a Jew would never worship a human. Therefore, we can at least conclude that the patient recognized Jesus as a revealer of God. Many people may see Jesus as a problem-solver. It is reasonable to bring our burdens to the Lord – sickness, the need for a job or a mate, broken relationship and so forth. After our prayers are answered, then what? Some may say bye-bye to Jesus. “See You next time when I am in trouble,” they said in their hearts. But Jesus is not only interested in serving as our consultant. He wants to be our Lord. He wants us to follow Him and learn to depend on Him. Jesus does not want to be a “mister” in our lives. He wants to be the “Master” of our lives.

CONCLUSION

Jesus came to restore our spiritual vision. The parents were spiritually blind because they resisted change and did not want to know more about Jesus. The Pharisees were also spiritually blind because they rejected the truth. As for the patient, he received grace from Jesus. Both his physical and spiritual blindness were healed. Which group of people can you identify yourself with? You know, through what happened in our lives God wants us to see things with our spiritual eyes. Jesus’ disciples viewed the man’s blindness as a theological problem about who had sinned. But Jesus corrected them by saying that the incident was an opportunity for people to witness God’s work. This week a national news headline is the forest fire in northern California. Some people lost their lives, and many lost their homes and businesses. One day a news video caught my attention. What shocked me was not the scene of destruction. We all know how devastating a fire can be. What shocked me was the image of a neighborhood being turned into ashes while the row of houses right across the street seemed untouched by fire. Some people may conclude that it was a matter of luck or fate. Believers know that everything is in God’s hands. Christians or not any person will encounter tragedies in life. Regardless of whether we are victims or by-standers God wants us to see things with our spiritual eyes. He wants us to witness His work in our world. God desires to see those who resist change to come closer to Him and those reject the truth to soften their hearts. Ultimately, our Lord wants everyone to receive His grace.