

Made Blind

John 9:35-41

“The same fire which melts wax hardens the clay.”

That’s true, isn’t it? Intuitively, you can understand that. Fire makes many things melt, it softens them. In other cases, fire causes materials to harden. Even to the point of becoming absolutely rigid or brittle.

That’s how you ought to understand Jesus’ words in,
v.39

And that’s how you can understand that verse in connection with verses such as,

John 3:17 “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”

Jesus’ purpose in coming into the world was to accomplish salvation, to shed his own blood and sacrifice his own life upon the cross as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. And to give life. So we read in,

John 1:4 “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.”

But we also read,

John 1:5 “And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.”

Further, in

John 3:19 “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”

That is the judgment referred to in verse 39. That judgment is the judgment of separation, separating those who would love and honor him from those who would hate him. Separating those who live by faith and those whose lives represent the very opposite of faith. Indeed, Jesus divides all men into two groups, and when he returns in glory, that division will be made permanent and eternal, the sheep and the goats. And that division is what we have before us this morning.

We see a man who was blind, but then made to see. And we actually have those who see being said to be made blind.
v.39

We’ll begin with those who are made to see, referring to the miracle we studied last week, which is an obvious outward illustration of a much greater inward spiritual reality. The ability to see is used as a symbol and illustration of faith. To see is to have faith. To have faith is to see. And that is really what is happening with this man born blind.

I implied last week that this man believed in Jesus, that he understood Jesus’ supernatural power and identity. Tonight, all that was implied last week is made obvious and evident.
v.38

That’s faith.

Now, let me say, first of all, that faith must have an object. That is, to have faith, is to have faith IN SOMETHING! Or in SOMEONE. Faith is to believe in a person. And so any discussion about faith must begin by identifying,

I. THE OBJECT OF FAITH.

There is a common expression used today to describe all

religious people, and it is the phrase “people of faith.” Politicians use that word a lot, because it lets them be inclusive, non-judgmental. In the public arena, the expression “people of faith” means Christians and Jews, Muslims and Hindu’s, Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons. And they are all put on the same footing. All lumped into the same category. People of faith. A corresponding phrase is, “places of worship.” It isn’t offensive at all today to publicly speak of people of faith going to places of worship, for those words keep all religions, people of all faiths, in the same category.

But they aren’t all in the same category, because they identify different objects of faith. Conflicting, contradictory, and mutually exclusive objects of faith. And so I want to give you a definition of faith this morning that is not inclusive, and not the least bit politically correct, but rather reflects that judgment I’ve referred to in verse 39.

A. Faith means that you believe in Jesus.

Faith, real faith, true faith, saving faith, means one thing above all else. That you believe in the Jesus Christ, the son of God, the second person of the trinity, who lived, died and was raised from the in order to sit at the right of the throne of his father in heaven. And that by believing, you have life in his name.

And so we read at the end of this gospel,

John 20:31 “These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”

That is the faith which we see in this man who had been born blind.

v.35

This is one of the very few times when Jesus actually used that title of himself, a title which ascribes deity and divinity to himself. It is a bold and clear announcement of his own claim to be God. Put in the form of a question, that the man might be given the opportunity to profess his faith. “Do you believe in the Son of God?”

Now, before I move, let me linger with that question, and pose it to everyone of you. “Do you believe in the Son of God?” Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God? Do you believe that Jesus is God, the divine messiah? Do you believe that Jesus is exactly who he claimed to be, exactly who he was revealed to be? Do you believe that he is Lord, master of all? Do you believe that he is the savior, the only mediator between you and God, the only one who could atone for your sins and the only one capable of satisfying God’s wrath and justice on your behalf?

Do you believe? If so, you have life. If not, you are still dead in your sins, condemned to an eternal sentence in the lake of fire.

Do you believe?

And what a great answer Jesus received when he asked that question.

v.36

You ought to immediately think about Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, the encounter told to us in,

Act 8:27 “Behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, 28 was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet. 29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go near and

overtake this chariot." 30 So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" 31 And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 The place in the Scripture which he read was this: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; And as a lamb before its shearer is silent, So He opened not His mouth. 33 In His humiliation His justice was taken away, And who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth." 34 So the eunuch answered Philip and said, "I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?" 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him."

"How can I, unless someone teaches me?" So we must teach. We must preach. Not the thoughts of man. Not the ten steps of personal self-advancement. Not the gospel of self-help, but the gospel of Jesus Christ. We must open the Bible, and preach Jesus to people. People who don't know him, who don't understand him.

And Jesus certainly did that with this man born blind.
v.36-37

And the man responded.
v.38

Faith doesn't simply mean that you are religious. It means that you believe in Jesus! And something else.

B. Faith means that you worship Jesus.

Believing is not done in a vacuum. It is not done merely in the intellectual realm. It is not simply accepting a certain set of facts, such as the laws of thermodynamics that I learned in my engineering studies. Faith is not simply believing that 2 plus 2

equals 4. Faith is not merely intellectual assent to a certain formulation of doctrine.

It is all of that, and 2 plus 2 does equal 4. Always, in absolute way, without exception. But faith is much more. Faith means that you worship Jesus. That's why faith has to have an object, because faith is inseparably connected with the response of worship. To have faith is to worship the object of your faith.

Thus, to believe in Jesus is to worship Jesus!

And so I will ask you that question again. "Do you believe in the Son of God?" And what I really mean by that question is this, "Will you worship Jesus?" Will you bow your knee and confess with your tongue that Jesus is Lord?

Not just, do you understand the doctrine? But, will you worship and glorify the one who is identified and defined by that doctrine? Will you surrender your life to his authority, and submit to his Lordship?

I simply have to declare to you, that you must! You must submit your life to the rule of Jesus. And honor him with your worship and adoration. Otherwise, you will find yourself numbered with those who are made blind.

v.39

There we have,

II. THE OPPOSITE OF FAITH.

Those made blind. Those made unable to see.

Jesus continues this same illustration. The blind man is made to see. But those who see, they will be made blind. What does

he mean, “Those who see?”

I believe the answer to that question is clear. It is those who think they can see. That is, those who think that their relationship with God is established, based upon their own acts of righteousness and law-keeping. Simply put,

A. Many people believe that their own righteousness is adequate.

They think that their own attempts to live a good life are adequate grounds for the claim to have eternal life, that they are saved, on the basis of their own good works.

In terms of this illustration, they think that they can see.

Rev. 3:17 “Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’ --and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked-- 18 “I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.”

People who think they can see are people who think they are rich, and in need of nothing. They are people who do not realize that they are wretched; in fact, blind.

It is the same idea as what we find in the account of the pharisee and the tax collector. Remember the prayer of that self-righteous Pharisee,

Luke 18:10 “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 “The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like

other men--extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. 12 ‘I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’”

And don’t ever catch yourself praying, “God, I thank you that I am not like that Pharisee over there!”

I will say it again. Many people believe that their own righteousness is adequate. They believe that they have lived good enough lives. They believe that if they were to stand before God and hear the question, “Why should I let you into my heaven?”, they could answer, “Because I’ve lived a good life. I’ve tried to do what’s right.”

But God’s answer is inevitable, “That’s not enough.”

Oh, the great, great dangers of Phariseeism. The great, great dangers of self-righteousness. Thinking that somehow your own acts of righteousness and law-keeping are adequate for you to gain entrance into heaven.

Let me tell you something. They aren’t!

Isaiah 64:6 “But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away.”

Or, in the NT words of Paul, in the letter to the church at Rome, quoting from the Old Testament,

Rom.3:10 As it is written: “There is none righteous, no, not one; 11 There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. 12 They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.”

Your righteousness is not adequate. Not even close. Your attempts at obedience may be praiseworthy at times, at your best times, but they are not adequate to satisfy God's justice and wrath. They are not adequate to atone for your sins. They are not adequate for you to claim an inheritance in the kingdom of God. They are not, in any way whatsoever, adequate as the basis of your salvation.

In fact, as Jesus says so pointedly,

B. People who believe that their own righteousness is adequate shall be condemned.

Those who see, those who think they see, shall be made blind!

v.39

And the Pharisees react predictably.

v.40

There is sarcasm and contempt all through those words. They are beginning to express their anger, and their ridicule of Jesus for his claim that they were blind.

Jesus' answer is profound, and cuts to the very heart of their self-righteousness.

v.41

"Now you say, 'We see.' Therefore your sin remains."

Did you catch that? Those who think that they see, those who think that their lives are adequate, those who think that they are rich, remain under the guilt and condemnation of their sins.

Back to those people in Revelation 3 who thought they were rich.

Rev. 3:17 "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' --and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked."

I understand all of this personally, because I grew up thinking, "I am rich, and have need of nothing." I grew up in my early years thinking and believing the unspoken gospel that if I did what was right, I would go to heaven. I grew up thinking that since I went to church, I would go to heaven.

There was only one problem. One large problem. My own sin. And my own guilt. And as long as I thought that my own works of righteousness were adequate, I remained dead in my sin. And I was saved, the Lord brought me from death unto life, with a very simply message, "I was a sinner." A sinner whose sin separated me from God. A sinner who needed a savior.

The Apostle Paul gives the same testimony, doesn't he?
Phil. 3:3-11

Having said all of that, let me move on to my third point.

III. THE ESSENCE OF FAITH.

Let's talk a little bit more about what faith is all about. And I'm going to build on all that I have just said. I'm convinced that faith is based upon this very recognition of sin that I have been talking about. I'm convinced that true, genuine, saving...

A. Faith is built upon a painful recognition of your own sinfulness.

Notice what Jesus says.

v.41

“If you were blind...” If you would recognize your own blindness. If you would realize “that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked,” then you will have the forgiveness of sins. If you would recognize and admit the horror of your own sinfulness, and plead for forgiveness, then you will know what it means to be cleansed!

If you recognize and admit your blindness, you shall be enabled to see!

Again, that story of the pharisee and the tax collector.

Luke 18:13 “And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ 14 “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

There is another way to put it.

Is. 57:15 “For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”

There is another way to put it.

Ps. 51:17 “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart--These, O God, You will not despise.”

Similarly,

Ps. 34:18 “The LORD is near to those who have a broken

heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit.”

Isn't that what Jesus is saying here?

“If you were blind, [if you would recognize your own blindness,] you would have no sin.”

God dwells in the high and holy place. And with him who has a contrite and humble spirit.

That's why it is good to be reminded of sin. That's why it is good to be exhorted to greater obedience and a deeper experience of holiness. That's why the preaching of the word ought to humble you and crush you, not just pat you on the back and flatter you. Because it is in the experience of the presence of sin, the painful experience of the presence of sin, that nurtures faith. Faith is the expression of a sinner, crying out in repentance for salvation. Again,

Ps. 34:18 “The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit.”

Indeed,

B. A painful recognition of your own sinfulness is the context in which you are forgiven.

I'm convinced that, in general, we prefer to soft-pedal our sins, and downplay the horror and the heinousness of our sinfulness. We recoil against the thoughts of our own moral worthlessness and the wretchedness of our offenses against God. We just don't think we're that bad!

But the blessings of forgiveness are received and experienced most deeply, and most fully, after the deepest experiences of our utter sinfulness. Our catechism will speak of the grief and hatred

of sin. Grief and hatred.

Not self-esteem. Not self-worth. But worthlessness. Moral worthlessness as we stand before a holy God. And a just God. Who “so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

So what about you? Are you blind? I hope that you will admit that you are. That you fall short of the glory of God. That apart from Christ, you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.

And when you come to terms with those things, then you are ready to hear of the good news of Jesus Christ. And then, when you are painfully confronted by the sinfulness that still remains within your own heart, then you will be able to hear these words with the greatest joy and grateful amazement,

Ps.103:8 “The LORD is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. 9 He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever. 10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. 11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; 12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.”

That’s faith, true faith. Not a faith that boosts your ego, but faith that humbles your heart, a faith that causes your heart to be crushed with the sorrowful weight of your own sin, and in that sorrow, to know that Jesus has died for you that you might be forgiven.

So learn to say of yourself, “What things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all

things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.”

And so we sing in the familiar hymn,=8=

“Upon that cross of Jesus my eyes at times can see the very dying form of one who suffered there for me; and from my smitten heart with tears, two wonders I confess, the wonders of redeeming love and my unworthiness. I take, O cross, thy shadow for my abiding place; I ask no other sunshine than the sunshine of his face; Content to let the world go by, to know no gain nor loss, my sinful self my only shame, my glory all the cross.”