

God's great Word guides the blind.

Text: Isaiah 42:14-21 for 3/15/2020 by Pastor Jeff Bolwerk

¹⁴I have been silent for a long time. I have kept still. I have restrained myself. Like a woman giving birth, I will scream. I will gasp and pant. ¹⁵I will dry up mountains and hills. I will make all their grass wither. I will turn rivers into islands. I will dry up pools. ¹⁶I will lead the blind on a way they do not know. Along paths they do not know I will direct them. Ahead of them I will turn darkness into light and rough places into level ground. These are the promises I will accomplish for them. I will not abandon them. ¹⁷They will be turned back and be completely disgraced—those who trust in an idol, those who say to molten images, “You are our gods.”¹⁸You deaf ones, listen! You blind ones, watch carefully so you can see! ¹⁹Who is so blind as my servant or so deaf as my messenger whom I sent? Who is so blind as my covenant partner and so blind as the servant of the Lord? ²⁰You see many things, but you do not observe. He opens his ears, but he does not hear. ²¹Because of his righteousness the Lord was pleased to make his law great and glorious.

How good is your vision? Many of us here today have some problem with our vision. For most of us those problems can be corrected in rather simple ways. Things such as eyeglasses, contacts, and even laser surgery are used regularly to help correct people's vision. But there are some vision problems that cannot be easily corrected. Such as macular degeneration which slowly destroys the vision of many, and there is no way to cure the problem. Then there are those who are completely blind due to illnesses, accidents, or they may have been born that way. Whether it's physical blindness or macular degeneration, there are some types of blindness that medicine and science cannot fix.

There is another type of blindness that science and medicine cannot help with and that is spiritual blindness. But this morning we hear from God as he is giving the people of this world a gift to help guide them out of their spiritual blindness. God's prophet Isaiah tells us how ...

Theme: God's great Word guides the blind.

- I. It guides them away from sinful idols.
- II. It guides them on a way they do not know.

The prophet Isaiah lived during the time the divided kingdom of Israel. There was the Northern Kingdom which called itself Israel, and there was the smaller Southern Kingdom of Judah. By the time Isaiah had written these words the Northern Kingdom was completely gone. The people of the Northern Kingdom had forsaken God, so God sent the Assyrian army to carry them off into exile never to return. Only Judah was left, and they too were slowly turning away from God.

So God sends the prophet Isaiah to warn Judah about this problem in their relationship with God. God warns to his people, saying, **“They will be turned back and be completely disgraced—those who trust in an idol, those who say to molten images, ‘You are our gods’”** (v. 17). Judah's problem was that they were worshiping false gods, idols. It was rulers, like wicked King Ahaz, who led the people to worship the false gods of Baal and Ashteroth. The people were making metal statues of Baal, and carving pieces of wood to make the god Ashteroth. Then they would bow before these idols and pray to for them to help and save them.

Initially God tries to help the people see their problem. God points to the wood used for their idols and says about that wood, **“Half of it he burns in a fire [...]. So he is warm and**

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says, 'Ah! I am warm. I see the light of the fire.' Then from what is left he makes a god to serve as his idol. He bows down to it. He worships it, and he prays to it, 'Save me, because you are my god'" (Isaiah 44:16-17). God is trying to get his people to see how foolish they are for worshipping a piece of wood! That piece of wood cannot save them from their earthly enemies, and it certainly cannot get them out of hell.

So when the people ignore God's warnings, God sends Isaiah back to the people to point out their real problem. God says through his prophet: "**You deaf ones, listen! You blind ones, watch carefully so you can see!**" (v. 18). Doesn't that sound like a rather mean thing to say? If I ran up to someone whom I knew was blind and said, "Look at that," that would be degrading and downright cruel!

So why would God tell deaf people to listen and blind people to see? God is trying to get the people of Judah to realize something about themselves: They ARE deaf and blind to the true God, and that deafness and blindness shows itself in their lives. God says, "**Who is so blind as my servant or so deaf as my messenger whom I sent? Who is so blind as my covenant partner and so blind as the servant of the Lord? You see many things, but you do not observe. He opens his ears, but he does not hear**" (vs. 19-20). The people made themselves blind and deaf to God. They saw God's miracles as he saved them from their enemies, but they paid no attention to God working in their lives. God gave the people of Judah his precious promises of a Savior from sin. But they rejected God's promises by not listening to what he said. They turned away from the God they couldn't see and turned to idols that they could see for their "salvation." The people had blinded themselves to the true God's salvation and were blindly stumbling down a path that would leave them eternally lost.

But God is not speaking only the people of Judah. When God says to us, "**You deaf ones, listen! You blind ones, watch carefully so you can see!**" (v. 18), how do we respond? Do we tell God, "I can see and hear just fine. I read my Bible. I come to worship. There is nothing wrong with my spiritual vision." If that is the case, then we have missed the point of God's words. We all have spiritual "blind spots." We all have those idols that cause us to turn a blind eye to God's Law and a deaf ear to his Commands. What idols are causing blind spots in our spiritual vision? Is it the idol of religious pride? Many of us have been hearing God's word since we were little children. We hear, study, and know his word, yet too often we only apply those words to our lives when it's convenient or it makes us feel good. We feel our knowledge of God's word somehow makes us a little closer to God, a little holier than others. Or what about the idols we worship right here at St. Matthew's. How many are worshipping the idols of history and tradition, longing to live in the glory days of the past when we had over a thousand members and packed the pews? We worship that "god" as if the true God cannot bring about good from changes we make to meet the needs of our current world. We cling to memories instead of clinging to God's promises.

Far too often we keep worshipping those sinful idols as if they are not a danger to our faith; as if we don't need God's help in dealing with them. The real problem here is being unwilling to recognizing and admit our own spiritual deafness and blindness. And as we walk through life in the blindness of our sins, we stumble down a path that will leave us eternally lost.

God should say of us, "**They will be turned back and be completely disgraced—those**

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who trust in an idol, those who say to molten images, 'You are our gods'" (v. 17). Our blind worship of false gods should bring us complete disgrace in hell. But thanks be to God that he doesn't leave us in our blindness. Isaiah tells us, "**Because of his righteousness the Lord was pleased to make his law great and glorious**" (v.21). How does God make his "law" great? When all of that law is fulfilled. God's law was completely fulfilled in Christ. As people were closing their eyes and turning their backs on God's commands, Christ was keeping every one of them perfectly. Having fulfilled the law in our place, Jesus then took on himself the punishment for sin the law demands. Christ took our suffering and hell upon himself. On a cross Jesus paid for our idol worship and spiritual blindness. Our Lord closed his eyes in death so he could open our eyes and lead us out of our spiritual darkness and into the light of life. Through the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection we receive faith and the forgiveness that it brings. Through that faith Christ restores the spiritual vision of those whose eyes have been blinded by sin, and he does that through his word. God's great Word guides the blind. That's us. It guides us away from sinful idols and into God's glorious light.

God's great Word not only turns spiritually blind people off the road to hell, but it turns them around and gets them pointed in the right directions. God's great Word guides the blind on a way they do not know. We don't know the way to heaven.

Through Isaiah, our heavenly Father pictures for us his never-ending work of guiding us back to himself. He says, "**I have been silent for a long time. I have kept still. I have restrained myself. Like a woman giving birth, I will scream. I will gasp and pant**" (v.18). While picturing God as a pregnant woman about to give birth may seem a bit strange, God uses shocking picture to make this point: Like a woman who is about to give birth, when the time comes for God's promises to be fulfilled there is nothing anyone can do to stop them. We see this truth in the birth of Jesus. Scripture tells us, "**When the time had fully come God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law to redeem those under law**" (Galatians 4:4-5). Jesus came into this world exactly when God wanted him to. This will also be true for when Jesus returns on Judgment Day. We do not know when our Savior is returning, but we do know that when the time for that promise to be fulfilled has come, there will be nothing that can stop it.

We do not need to fear Jesus return on Judgment Day because God has promised to help us. God says through Isaiah, "**I will dry up mountains and hills. I will make all their grass wither. I will turn rivers into islands. I will dry up pools**" (v.15). This probably doesn't sound like help. It sounds like destruction. But what God is doing is picturing the help he will give to the people in the next verse. God is saying, "Not only the vegetation and the water, but the mountains and hills will shrivel-up and become nothing." So how is that helping people?

Imagine you are blind. Between you and salvation are rivers and thick underbrush and hills and mountains. One dangerous obstacle after another. Being blind you have no idea how to even begin to find your way through these dangers. But then God comes along and says, "Let me help you," and with his almighty power he wipes away everything that stands between you and him.

God says, "**I will lead the blind on a way they do not know. Along paths they do not know I will direct them. Ahead of them I will turn darkness into light and rough places into level ground. These are the promises I will accomplish for them. I will not abandon them**"

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(v.16). There are two ways that God helps us with our blindness. First, he removes our spiritual blindness by using his law to show our sin and our need for a Savior. Then he uses the gospel to show us that Savior, Jesus.

Yet even in faith we still struggle with the blindness sin causes. Without God to guide us we don't know the way to heaven. That's why we need to keep going back to God's great Word. It's God's Word that guides us on a path we do not know, that path to heaven. From our perspective, that path doesn't look so smooth and even. It looks narrow and steep and rocky and difficult to walk on. Yet, as we reach those places in life where it seems the most difficult to continue on toward heaven, God is there to guide us through those rough places. He makes those rough places smooth by giving us the strength to get through them. He uses his Word as a lamp for our feet and a light for our path (Psalm 119:105). God has promised he will not abandon us, and God never goes back on his promises. By his great Word he will guide us on the path to eternal glory.

Glasses and contacts may help the vision of some people, and laser surgery can even correct severe cases of poor vision. Yet there are some types of "blindness" that human effort and ingenuity cannot correct. Human effort and technology cannot remove spiritual blindness. But God can. God gave the world his Word. He promised a Savior from sin, and at just the right time he fulfilled that promise. Jesus frees us from our sins, freeing us from our spiritual blindness and leading us by the hand on the path to eternal life. Amen.