

West Valley Presbyterian Church  
2020-09-27 John 9:24-34 – **Would You Rather Be Right or Do Right?**  
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John 9:24-34 ESV

24 So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, “Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner.” 25 He answered, “Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” 26 They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” 27 He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” 28 And they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. 29 We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” 30 The man answered, “Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. 32 Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” 34 They answered him, “You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?” And they cast him out.

**Who are the Pharisees and why should we care?**

If you grew up in church hearing gospel stories, then you’ve heard of the Pharisees. We tend to think of them as “the bad guys,” the ones in the black hats who are out to get Jesus, yet we never understand why they are so angry with him.

But if we simply write the Pharisees off and say to ourselves, “boy I’m glad I’m not like them!” then we are missing a lot of what John is trying to teach us in this story about who Jesus is, how the gospel works, and what forms true blindness takes.

The Pharisees were, generally speaking, part of the middle class – unlike the Sadducees who were upper class. The Pharisees were more influential outside Jerusalem among the synagogues, while the Sadducees exercised power via the Temple in Jerusalem and the machinery of the sacrificial system. The Pharisees weren’t priests. They were primarily teachers and scholars, and they knew their Scriptures forwards and backwards. They were People of the Word.

In his excellent commentaries on Matthew and John, my favorite Bible teacher Dale Bruner includes his own translations of the passages from Greek. He always refers to the Pharisees as the Serious Ones.

**The Pharisees were The Serious Ones**

**The way to stay close to God was through perfect obedience to the Law.**

The Pharisees were hard core. They were desperate to see Israel get back on track. They believed that if they could just get everyone in Israel to perfectly obey the law *for just one day*, then Messiah would return. Yet, like all people who are aiming for perfection, they were

frustrated and resentful of everyone who wasn't as hard core as them. And they were especially infuriated with Jesus because, based on his knowledge of the Torah, he should be as committed to perfection as they were. But he clearly wasn't! He ate with the wrong people, failed to enforce ritual purity rules with his students, talked about his relationship with God in intimate terms that sounded like heresy to them, and seemed intent on breaking the Fifth Commandment at least once every Sabbath!

**Pharisees care more about  
Being Right  
than  
Doing Right.**

What do I mean by that? I mean: The Pharisees were so worried about whether or not Sabbath rules were being broken they couldn't just stop and say: Wow! You got healed! How great for you! Let's go into the Temple with you and your parents and present you to the priests! Let's go make a Thanks Offering to God! Let's celebrate!

So if we were trying to locate the Pharisaic spirit in our own culture, where might we see it? We see it among those who lament the decline of America as a "Christian nation." We hear it when people say that the reason America is in such a mess is because we don't allow prayer in schools. We feel its energy in the call for new laws that would require that the Ten Commandments to be posted in every courtroom.

Things aren't bad things. There are sound reasons for saying they are good things. And people who hold these views love God, love America, and love their neighbors. They are good people.

The Pharisees were good people too.

*When I see the Pharisees in scripture, I see how much they remind me of Me and those with whom I have grown up and grown old in the faith.*

It's the darndest thing, realizing that the form of Christianity with whom I so closely identify has been around long enough to develop Pharisaic ways. Of course we aren't alone in this. There are undoubtedly Pharisees in every faith tradition. They are the ones who say:

- If you don't use the right name for God or end with "In Jesus name," then your prayers can't be heard.
- If you go to "that church" or are part of "that denomination" then you aren't a real Christian.
- If your church doesn't use the right English translation of the Bible, then you aren't reading the real Bible.

The examples go on and on. And I'm sorry to say it, but once you see you can't unsee it, or not notice it all over the place. We read John 9 and want to identify ourselves with Jesus, or the person he heals, or at least with the clueless disciples. But if we aren't open to seeing a bit

ourselves in the Pharisees, then we risk the same blindness they are afflicted with. We good people who are frustrated with our place in our culture are sorely tempted to care more about being right than doing right.

This is the irony of the proclaimed Gospel. We think that wherever the gospel is proclaimed, people turn to God, experience transformation, and become part of the solution. But the terrible irony is this: **Whenever the gospel is faithfully proclaimed among Seriously Pious people, it doesn't automatically change their motivations. It just reveals them.**

This is the comparison John is making. Jesus' word and Jesus work show up in the life of the man born blind. He bears witness to it with humble honesty. But notice how the Pharisees respond:

- They start out certain in their conclusion: *We know Jesus doesn't represent God because he broke the Sabbath rules.*
- From this certainty add cynicism: *Give glory to God. We know this man is a sinner. What did he do to you... really?*
- Then they get really insulted: *Who do you think you are, a sinner lecturing us!?*
- Finally they get violent: *And they threw him out.*

This morning I simply ask that you NOTICE. Notice your own Pharisaic tendencies. Notice how quick you are judge what others say about God with skepticism or cynicism. Notice when other people's beliefs offend you, or when you feel the need to correct other people's ways of thinking or speaking about God. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal your blind spots to you – the places where you would rather Be Right than Do Right. I'm a pastor with multiple degrees - so you gotta know that I gotta deal with my Inner Pharisee all the time!!

I hope you can say with me: **But I don't wanna be a Pharisee anymore!** Great! With God's help, there is a way to avoid the Blindness of the Pharisee. As we will look at more closely next week, it comes down to a matter of choice.

**Choose to have a humble heart.** Practice not being offended by things that don't fit the way you've always seen them. Jesus calls us to have a "beginners mind."

**Choose relationships over being right.** Strive to maintain compassion and connection in your relationships with people. If they say or believe things that you feel are totally "not of God," choose to be curious over correct.

**Choose to celebrate the good.** When people are doing good things – no matter what their faith or their politics are – then affirm that. And among those who believe and vote the same way you do, call out the good and decide not to participate in the bad. AMEN.