

Seeing Things As They Really Are
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John 9:35-41 ESV

35 Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” 36 He answered, “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” 37 Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.” 38 He said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him. 39 Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.” 40 Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, “Are we also blind?” 41 Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.

Don is my therapist. In his office, on a very small whiteboard that sits in a corner on the floor, Don wrote:

**There’s nothing wrong with you.
Life is just harder than you thought it would be.**

I love that sign. It’s been there for years, and Don will draw my attention back to it every now and again. It’s kind of his motto. But given that, you’d think he’d make a nicer sign. Or at least hang up on the wall. But no, it still has the look of something that was quickly jotted down – like a stroke of insight – which could easily be erased and replaced with some other, greater insight when it comes. But nothing has replaced it.

I love how unpretentious it is, how matter-of-fact. And how full of grace.

I hear Jesus saying these words. I hear him saying them to me when I flop down in the chair, convinced that my life is as hard as it is because I am stupid, or lazy, or some other flavor or sinful and degenerate. Judging myself this way is pretty much my default. Maybe you can relate to that.

I imagine Jesus saying this when his disciples ask, “Why is this guy’s life so hard – because he screwed up or because his parents did?” And Jesus turning to the man and saying to him – in their presence - “There’s nothing wrong with you. Life is just harder than you thought it would be.” This is just how life is. This is the way things really are.

For John – the person telling this story – the healing is an outward sign of inward reality. The physical blindness points to a spiritual blindness that the gospel can liberate us from.

**The power of the Gospel works for our Salvation.
Salvation includes being able to see things as they really are.**

The reason we look to Jesus - and look to the Scriptures that *point to Jesus* - is because Jesus is so gracious as to tell us how life really is.

Last week we focused on the Pharisees, which feels important to me because it is clearly important to John. They get more lines in John's story than the healed man, or even Jesus himself. John wants us to know that the gospel may open us to seeing life as it really is, but we aren't forced to do so. When we hear the truth, it will either illuminate our lives or it will reveal resistant we are to coming out of darkness.

The Pharisees accuse Jesus of judging them, but he doesn't. He doesn't even bring it up – they do. In one sense the whole story is about judging what is true or not and who is sinful or not. Everyone is trying to figure out what's what and justify themselves. John 9 begins and ends with a desire to judge. At first, the Disciples want to get to the bottom of why the man was born blind. Then at the end, the Pharisees get offended and say in effect, "Are you calling us blind, Jesus?" But Jesus responds with, "The fact that you are asking that question reveals more about what your heart than does mine." Of course the Pharisees get defensive about everything Jesus says and does. Judgment is all they know.

Jesus does judge! The one person in all the world who is in a position to judge others, refuses to do so. There is a lesson for us here. This is an incredible revelation of God's heart, and an incredibly challenging example for us to follow if we are willing to accept it.

I am increasingly convinced that Jesus had two big Thou-Shalt-Nots. They are important for us to remember when we get to text like this. Throughout the gospels Jesus repeatedly tells us NOT to judge and not to be afraid. I think there is some symmetry there. When life turns out to be harder than we thought it would be, for us it's fight or flight, blame or deny, condemn or cower. Jesus gives us these two Thou-Shalt-Nots because he loves us, because he knows these are our default settings, and he knows that they prevent us from receiving the mercy that God offers us in the midst of life being way harder than we thought it would be.

My therapist's sign has been an expression of Jesus' love, and an articulation of the gospel to me. It reminds me of what the Bible teaches: Namely, that instead of getting twisted up around the question "what is wrong with me?" I can look to Jesus and ask, "How might God be glorified through this?"

When life is harder than you thought it would be, Jesus is there. Actually, he is there BEFORE that realization hits us, before we even know how hard life can be or how desperately we might need him. And as he does for this man, he is working his mercy before we recognize him for who He is, before we even acknowledge him before others, much less worship him as the man does here at the very end of this story.

That's the nature of the Gospel, and the grace that comes to us through it. It is at work in us long before we realize it. The gospel's truth doesn't come to us all at once. Just like the truth of

my therapist's little sign hasn't come to all at once. The Gospel, as Jesus so often said, is best compared to a seed. It gets planted in us. It breaks its husk open. First roots stretch down into our hearts, unseen. Then the most unassuming of sprouts breaks through the soil.

I marvel at how the man's physical sight is restored at the beginning, yet from that point on, his insight grows and grows, and opens up like a glorious flower.

After regaining his sight, notice what the man says about the one who healed him:

Vs 12 – Where is this Jesus you say healed you?

“I don't know.”

Vs 17 – What do you say about him?

[I guess] “He is a prophet.”

Vs 24 – He is a rule breaker.

“I don't anything about that. All I know is that I used to be blind, but now I can see!”

Vs. 33 – We don't know where he comes from.

“Unless he came from God, he could do nothing.”

Vs 35 – Do you believe in the Son of Man?

“Lord, I believe” and worships him.

As his understanding grows based only on his commitment to simply tell the truth, faith becomes more and more possible and more and more necessary.

**Jesus reveals just enough of himself to make faith possible,
but conceals enough of himself to make faith necessary.**

Wherever you are on your faith journey, the gospel is like this – it's growing in such a way that faith is now possible, and yet more faith is necessary. You are sensing God to a certain extent, which gives you the inkling that there is so much more of God that God wants to reveal to you. You've been healed at some level, which really begins the process of the greater, deeper healing – if you will be open to it. Jesus initiates the relationship, but never forces himself on anyone. Mercy comes to us before we knew how much we needed it, and grace enables us to keep going.

As we come to the Lord's Table this morning, I invite you to remember that this is pure grace, total mercy being offered to you. This last week, the Session met together each afternoon for prayer. We began with these words from Isaiah, chapter 55:

Opening Invitation from Isaiah 55

55:1 “Come, all you who are thirsty,
come to the waters;

and you who have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without cost.

2 Why spend money on what is not bread,
and your labor on what does not satisfy?
Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.

So too do we approach this Table, hearing an invitation that is pure gift.