

## God Just Can't Win

John 9:1-41

The Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 26, 2017

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

You know there are days when our Lord just can't win.

He is in Jerusalem. He heals a blind man. As soon as He heals the blind man, He starts an argument. People see the blind man seeing. They wonder if it is really him. Some say it is him. Some say it is not him. The man himself tries to convince them that it is him.

Rather than believe the man, they take him to the Pharisees and things go downhill from there. The Pharisees ask the man what happened and the man tells them what happened, at least the parts that he saw. The Pharisees are divided. Some of them think that Jesus is from God because only a man from God could give sight to the blind. Other Pharisees say that Jesus cannot possibly be from God because Jesus healed the guy on the Sabbath. They therefore concluded that Jesus was working on the Sabbath and since that is against the Law of God Jesus could not possibly be from God.

In order to get around all of this the Pharisees call in the man's parents. They ask them if this is their son and if he was born blind. They ask them how he got his sight. The Pharisees are probably hoping that the parents will reveal that he was not born blind so that they don't have to believe in Jesus. The parents testify that this man is their son. They testify that he was born blind. They claim they don't know how he acquired his sight. They did this because they feared the Jews and did not want to get thrown out of the synagogue.

Well, no help there for the Pharisees. They now have the testimony of two witnesses that this man was born blind. They can see that he now has his sight. Jesus has performed a miracle. But rather than to believe in Jesus they turn to the man and say to him, "Tell us how he restored your sight." The man himself asks them why they want to hear it again. I think they want to hear it again because they are hoping for some kind of discrepancy in his testimony in order to avoid the inevitable conclusion that Jesus is from God! But the man is so incredulous that they would ask him a second time how he regained his sight that he figures that maybe the Pharisees want to be disciples of Jesus. When presented with this possibility the Pharisees are enraged and throw the man out of the synagogue.

It was just one little healing. Couldn't they accept just one little healing? What is so bad with healing a person? What is so bad with healing a person on the Sabbath? Isn't it right to do good on the Sabbath and not evil? And why do they have to pester the poor person who received his sight. He had been blind his whole life, then as soon as Jesus gives him his sight he is the center of controversy. The Pharisees were arguing over him and accusing him of all kinds of false things. They even told him that he was steeped in sin at birth. They told him he had no right to tell them anything. When he was blind he was in the synagogue a member in good standing if a beggar. Once Jesus gave the poor man his sight, they immediately threw him out of the synagogue.

If it were not for Jesus telling him that Jesus is the Son of Man and bidding the man to believe in Him, the man may very well have been better off to have stayed blind! Wow!

And what is all of the fuss about? Why would the Pharisees be so intent to disprove an obvious miracle? The more they investigate the miracle looking for contradictions in the testimony, the more they get consistent testimony. Jesus gave sight to the blind man. Even the blind man figured it out throughout this whole experience. At first he did not know about Jesus. Then he said that Jesus is a prophet. Then he

said that Jesus is from God. The blind man had no trouble believing in Jesus. Why do the Pharisees have such a problem?

It has to do with the question that the disciples asked Jesus when the disciples first saw the blind man. They asked Jesus, "Who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?"

The disciples asked this because they knew from the Scriptures that God punished the wicked. Since God punished the wicked with terrible and horrible things and it was terrible and horrible to be blind then the blind man must have done something to receive God's judgment in this fashion.

Perhaps the disciples knew that the man was blind from the time he was born. If they did, that would explain why they ask our Lord if it is was the man's parents who had sinned that they were cursed with a blind child. After all the Scripture does say that God visits the sins of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Him. Even David's son by Bathsheba died, but he died not because of anything he himself had done, but he died because God was punishing David for the sins that David had committed. So God punishes David by killing his son.

The disciples knew this. They knew that in the justice of God this man had sinned or his parents had sinned. If the disciples knew this then the Pharisees surely knew this. The Pharisees would have known all about the passages where God punishes people for their sins in this fashion.

And this is why they cannot stand the miracle of Jesus. As long as the man is blind the Pharisees and the disciples can walk past him and say to themselves, "At least I am better than that man. At least I have not sinned so badly as to warrant the punishment of blindness from God."

They could stand there and use the blind man and his suffering as way of patting themselves on the spiritual back and ignoring their own sins. They would use the blind man in the pride of their evil and wicked hearts to dare to go before God and claim righteousness before Him because they could see. They would dare to go before the judgment seat of almighty God and make the claim, "We see."

And so it is today. When some natural disaster strikes some location there is always some Pharisee who points to it and says, "That is God's judgment on those sinners." The statement is true enough, the problem is that it is spoken by someone who is a sinner himself and deserves to receive exactly what happened to the people struck by the disaster. But he does not see that. All he can see is their sins or the political gain they can make by blaming some politician for not responding fast enough to the crisis. People are suffering and dying and all some people can do is render judgment. And the reason that they render judgment is that they are trying to justify themselves before God with their own righteousness. They want to earn their way into heaven with their good deeds and they think that God will be impressed when they point out to God what His judgment is on others as a means to making the claim before Him that they are righteous because He has not punished them in the same way.

Such people are cold hearted. They do not help their neighbor. They do not sing to God praise for His grace and mercy shown to them. They never see the blessings of their own life because they figured that they have earned it all. What the disciples should have asked the Lord is this, "Why aren't we blind for we are sinners as he is?" Then they would have understood better the Lord's answer to the question than they did ask when He says, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned that he was born blind, but this was done so that God may be glorified in his life."

That is why Jesus came into this world for judgment. He came to condemn such people who would use the suffering of others not as an opportunity for showing mercy but use their suffering to exalt their own selfish righteousness. They thereby reveal that their righteousness is so pitiful in the eyes of God that they need to resort to such heartlessness. They claim to see and their guilt remains.

You realize of course that it will be the same for you as it was for the blind man.

Jesus has forgiven you of all of your sins. Like the blind man in order to bestow this blessing upon you Jesus performed a miracle. In your case, He rose from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus is what validates everything that Jesus said and did. Since the death of Jesus atones for your sins, the resurrection of Jesus validates that atonement.

And people have the same reaction to you and to your Lord that the Pharisees did to the blind man and his Lord. The first thing they do is question the testimony. People will say that the apostles are unreliable witnesses. They will claim that the apostles were so fanatical about Jesus that they claimed that He rose from the dead in order to save their little messianic movement from extinction. Or they will say that the apostles hallucinated out of their abject grief and only thought they saw Jesus risen from the dead. People will say that the apostles secretly knew that they could make a name for themselves with this Jesus and once He died in their pride they told people that He had risen from the dead not to bring glory to Him, but to bring glory to themselves. After all in the Church today we still acclaim the apostles as heroes and martyrs of the faith.

When such people are confronted with the fact that the apostles willingly gave their lives in defense of their testimony that Jesus had risen from the dead, these people still refuse to believe in Jesus and they begin to question the Bible. Or they question the Bible to begin with regardless of whether the apostles gave their lives or not. They will say that the Bible was not written by the apostles and prophets. They will say that the New Testament or at least significant portions of it were written many decades if not hundreds of years after the events which the New Testament claims to recount. These people will say that the Church made up such stories for its own self interest and claimed that the apostles said it and then perpetrated that on the common people so that they would believe it too.

Such people do not believe in Jesus. Such people refuse to believe in Jesus. And according to the testimony of Ann Rice many of these people hate our Lord. They actually hate Him. They spend their lives studying the Scriptures with the sole purpose of debunking them.

And why? What is so bad about believing in Jesus? What is the hatred that they have for the One who came from God to show them mercy? And why do they hate you people so badly that they would refuse to believe in your Lord. I suppose you are all sinners and that may be off putting to some people, but if Jesus didn't come to forgive sinners, you folks would not be here at all! Why do they think that you are steeped in sin and ignorant of how the Bible works? Why do they think that every time you offer to them that they should be disciples of Jesus too that you are lecturing them like a person who is speaking above his station? Why do they deem themselves smarter than you and revile you because you are so ignorant as to believe in Jesus of Nazareth?

What did Jesus do that was so wrong? All He did was show mercy to the whole world.

They do it because they want to be able to do the same thing that the Pharisees did. They want to be able to claim their own righteousness in front of whatever God it is that they worship. People worship all kinds of gods these days, but the one thing that we all share in common is the desire to be guiltless in front of those gods. In the pride and arrogance of our hearts all of us want to stand in front God and be able to claim our own righteousness. We want to be able to demand from God our blessings and do so because He is obliged to reward us because we are so good. We want there to be other people around that we can use to exalt ourselves before God and make the claim that at least we are better than they are.

When Jesus forgives the whole world of its sins, one of the things that that means is that the whole world is guilty of sins. And because they claim their own righteousness, they do not sing when Jesus tells them that their sins are forgiven. They chafe and are angry with such words.

You folks sing. You sing because Jesus has forgiven you. You sing because Jesus has performed a great sign. He rose from the dead. And the apostles one after another give testimony over and over again that Jesus did do this. The apostles, one after another, give their lives rather than to relinquish their testimony. What is there to do, but to give thanks and sing? What is there to do but to admit that in comparison with such love and righteousness we are blind?

And what does Jesus do with blind people? Only one thing.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.