

## I WAS BLIND BUT NOW I SEE

John 9:1-41

I've told you before that my reading choices are somewhat widespread. So are my tv choices. I like to watch sitcoms- if it's a good one, and some action-adventure shows. I also like to watch documentaries, including some shows that are dedicated to science.

Several years back, Physicist Neil de Grasse Tyson starred in a remake of Carl Sagan's Cosmos. I like Dr. de Grasse Tyson's work, but I should tell you that Dr. Tyson has been publicly critical of religious thought- particularly Christianity. I mention that just in the interest of disclosure.

Now, I don't generally engage in arguments with people who are scientists. The truth is, I enjoy science- even when it challenges my religious beliefs. There is room in my imagination for both. If I were to be challenged by a scientist, I think my response would be to ask them, "Is it necessary for me to be an atheist to enjoy your work?"

Getting back to Dr. Tyson, in one show I watched he made the comment that the speed of light proves that the world is more than 6,000 years old, which is something that some people believe. He says it proves that because we can see objects that are more than 6,000 light years away. If the world were more than 6,000 years old, we wouldn't be able to see those objects according to him. Now, I wouldn't normally answer an objection like that, because there are some answers that science gives that I can't answer. This comment, however, is not a particularly good one. I think I could answer that particular objection rather handily, though I won't try to do that today.

However, Dr. Tyson's objection points to an issue that all of us have when our view of the world is challenged. There's a tendency among humans to explain away anything that we find uncomfortable or that is problematic for our worldview. "Yes, but..." seems to be a permanent part of our lexicon. Whether it's our faith that is being challenged or science or our political views or our views on just about anything, we become defensive when our core beliefs are challenged. That's just a part of human nature. This story in John is a perfect example of that.

In this story Jesus and his disciples passed a man who had been blind since birth. Jesus' Disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?"

Jesus answered them, "It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was in order that the works of God might be displayed in him. We must work the works of Him who sent Me, as long as it is day; night is coming, when no man can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

When he had said this, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle and applied the clay to his eyes, and said to him, "Go and wash in the pool of Siloam." And so, he went away and washed, and came back seeing.

Notice the reaction of the crowd. It says, The neighbors, therefore, and those who previously saw him as a beggar, were saying, "Is this not the one who used to sit and beg?" Others were saying, "This is he." Still others were saying, "No, but he is like him." He kept saying, "I am the one." Therefore, they were saying to him, "How then were your eyes opened?"

He answered, "The man who is called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash,' so I went away and washed, and I received sight." And they said to him, "Where is He?" He said, "I do not know."

Now, let's review here. Jesus and his Disciples encounter a blind man that Jesus heals. The man goes to wash in the pool of Siloam as he is told to do by Jesus. When he returns, he can see. But this challenges what his neighbors believe. So, they question him. They give the poor guy the third degree. They just don't give him a break.

In fact, they up the ante. They take him to the Pharisees, in part, because he was healed on the Sabbath. However, I think they would have taken him anyway. Again, therefore, the Pharisees also were asking him how he received his sight. And he said to them, "He applied clay to my eyes, and I washed, and I see."

Now, there is a division between them. Some say Jesus is not from God because he healed someone on the Sabbath. Others ask how Jesus can perform such miracles if he is not from God. So, they ask the opinion of the guy who had been healed. What do you think? He says that he believes Jesus is a prophet.

Apparently, this isn't enough for the Pharisees. They think the poor guy is pulling a scam on them. So, they call his parents. They ask them, "Is this man really your son who was blind?" They answer and say, "Yeah, that's our son alright. (Of course, I'm paraphrasing). He was blind, but now he sees! We don't get it. We don't know *how* he sees. Ask him. He's old enough to speak for himself."

The text makes no bones about it. The parents were afraid of the Pharisees. They had already agreed that anyone who proclaimed Jesus to be the Christ would be put out of the synagogue. The parents are trying to tread carefully here. That's why they said, "Ask him."

Now, I'm not sure from the text the exact sequence of events. One possibility is that the Pharisees called the man and spoke to him, then dismissed him and called the parents, and then called him back. The other possibility is that the man was there when they called his parents in to talk to them, and then spoke to the son again. Either way, they speak to the healed man a second time.

So, the Pharisees try to browbeat the guy. They say, "Look, we know this guy is a sinner. Just give glory to God. Stop telling us about him."

But the guy answers, "I don't know if I am a sinner or not. What I do know is that I was blind, and now I see."

So, they said, "What did he do to you?"

By this time, you can just feel the guy's frustration. "I already told you, and you didn't listen to me. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to be his Disciples too?"

So, they say, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that Moses is from God, but we don't know where this man is from."

But this guy has an answer for that too. "That's amazing. You don't know where he is from, yet he opened my eyes. Only God can do that."

They say, "We know that God does not hear sinners... By the way, that's not true. If God doesn't hear sinners, we're all in a pickle. "...but if anyone is God-fearing, and does His will, He hears him."

The man says, "Since the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

Well, they don't like that answer. It embarrasses them. So, they say, "Who do you think you are? You're a sinner, and you're trying to teach us?" So, they put him out.

Jesus heard that they had put him out, and finding him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

He answered and said, "And who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?"

Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you."

The man answered and said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshipped Him.

Now here's the thing. For the people of Palestine during Jesus' day, the Pharisees were the authority for truth. If you wanted to know the answers, this is where you went. Things are different today. We seek answers all sorts of places today, but in those days, the Pharisees were the ones you went to see.

One of the places we look today is to science. It is the source of wisdom that has been most critical of people of faith. But there are several things we could say about that.

First, all people believe in something- thus they all have faith. It may not be faith in Christ, but all people believe in something. Every person believes in something they can't prove or can't explain. I confess that I have a fantasy of asking a physicist to produce a sample of Dark Matter. If I don't know what that means, scientists have determined that the quantity of Matter in the universe is too small to explain why the universe works as it does- way too small. So, they theorize the existence of an undetectable type of matter called Dark Matter. The theory makes the math work, but since Dark Matter is undetectable, no one can prove it exists. Physicists take its existence on faith- whether they wish to admit that or not.

If any of you ask me to prove that there is a God, I can't. I know of no scientific principle that explains God's existence. I know of no way to test scientifically for God's existence. Yet, the most anyone can say in response to that is that we are even. Because I learned enough about scientific reasoning when I sought my math degree, that I learned that a negative statement can't be proven. Which means, there is no way to prove God doesn't exist.

That leaves us where we began. It leaves us with faith. My experience leads me to believe. I don't need any further proof. After twenty-six years of teaching the gospel and theology, I realize that there are many doctrines about God that I can't prove. I can't prove that miracles happen, but I have witnessed them. I can't prove that God forgives sins, or that Jesus was resurrected from the dead- I just believe it. I can't prove that Jesus Christ is the savior- I just believe it. I can't prove that God is one God in three persons- I just believe it. I can't prove that there is an afterlife or that there will be a day of judgment. I can't prove that God created the world. I can't prove any of that. I just believe it. I take it on faith.

The thing is that I don't have to prove it to myself- and neither do you. I have experiences in my own life that I can't explain any other way. I was blind, but now I see.

This story is ultimately about faith. It's been said that for the non-believer no explanation is possible and for the true believer no explanation is needed. I would like to believe that I fall in the latter category. There are going to be things I can't explain to you, and there are going to be things that you can't explain. That's the nature of faith. There are going to be things that you can't prove. There are going to be things that I can't prove. That's the nature of faith. That's okay with me. It doesn't really matter.

What I can tell you is, in the same way that a physicist looks at the math and says, "This works better if we have some dark matter here," I can look at my life and the world around me and say to myself, "This makes more sense to me if God is here." That's what I've got to tell you.

These things will make sense to us if we make allowance for a loving, forgiving God. I found that God in Jesus Christ. You can find God there too, if you are just willing to believe. God loves you. God forgives you. If you are blind, he will offer you sight.