

Meeting the Master ... Along the Dusty Road

Sterling UMC

April 3, 2011

John 9:1-41

Imagine what your life would be like if you had been born without the ability to see. Close your eyes for just a moment and think about that for a few minutes. If you were blind:

- You could experience the warmth of sunlight on your face, but not the full beauty of a sunrise—or a sunset—or a full harvest moon. Those sites can only be experienced with one's eyes.
- You could inhale the aromas of a spring garden, but the words, "red," "yellow," "purple," and "green" — words like that would be meaningless to you.
- You could hear the crashing surf and even taste the salty air—but the overlapping of briny, blue-green ocean waves and the gleaming white sand—all that would be beauty you could never know.
- You could touch your children's faces but you would never fully comprehend the joy of seeing their unique facial expressions.

The sad fact is life's richest experiences are lost or severely diminished without the ability to see.

And, whereas those of us who are blessed with physical sight can only IMAGINE what it would be like to be blind...there is a form of sightlessness that we DO experience every single day. I'm referring to that form of myopia that makes us blind to God's truth. You see, one of the side-effects of our fallen nature is that our sin clouds our vision when it comes to the ability to see and fully comprehend spiritual things. That's one of the reasons God gave us the Bible. By reading its inspired words, our eyes are opened to principles we would miss otherwise. As it says in Psalm 119:105, "Thy Word is a LAMP to my feet and a LIGHT to my path."

I'd like us to approach this morning's text with this principle in mind—asking God to use His Word to open our eyes to things we need to see in order to grow as Christ followers. Our text is a great passage for us to apply this principle because it tells us of a time when a man who had been blind since birth meets the Master along the dusty road and when he did his eyes were opened and his life was never the same.

Our story takes place shortly after the Feast of the Tabernacles in the early fall of 29A.D. Jesus and His followers were entering the temple area when they saw this man who had been blind from birth. He was outside the temple entrance doing the only thing blind people could do for a living back then: begging.

When suddenly Jesus came along. In an act of grace and compassion, Jesus reached down into the dust and made some mud with his saliva, put it on the man's eyes and told him to go wash in the pool of Siloam. And when he did he came back seeing.

This morning I want to look a little deeper into this story because if you look close, you can see many things. A careful inspection of this conversation with Jesus reveals much more than just one blind man who was healed.

So this morning I encourage you to open your eyes as wide as you can so you won't miss a thing. For, if we look closely at this exchange between Jesus and an un-named blind man, we can see things that at first glance we might miss.

1. The first thing we see is that Jesus miraculously saw an "invisible" man....

I say this because day after day....month after month...year after year....this man sat in this same place begging as people walked by-people who were too busy to even turn in his direction.

So you see, in a very real sense he was "invisible" to everyone who passed him by. And He was used to this invisibility. He expected people to overlook him for he had spent his entire life being ignored. He was blind -- people found that depressing. He was a beggar -- people would find that demanding. He was in their minds, a product of sin -- which meant they would find him disgusting.

So, mothers would walk by with their children and say things like: "Don't look at him; don't listen to him; don't pay any attention to him. He is sinful. He wants something, and he doesn't deserve it."

So it really was miraculous...or at least out of the ordinary...for Jesus to come to this poor man whom everyone else ignored, and STOP and LOOK. And you know when He did look, Jesus SAW more than a blind beggar. He also SAW the hurt and disappointment of a lonely man who lived in dependence and anonymity. Jesus SAW the hopelessness of a life lived in endless night that would never know dawn.

No one else SAW this....but Jesus did....in fact throughout His ministry, He always noticed things and people that others missed.

Once He looked up in a sycamore tree and SAW a short tax collector who needed to be set free from his bondage to greed. Another time as He walked through a bustling crowd, He FELT IT when a single woman, desperate for healing, touched the hem of His robe. He SAW a widow, whom no one else would have given a second glance, and observed that she gave everything she had to God. He SAW unimportant little children one day that adults in the crowd were trying to make disappear. He SAW the disciple's doubt and fear on a stormy boat ride. He NOTICED when His friends argued about who was to be the greatest disciple. You know, I bet that sometimes His disciples wished He didn't SEE so much.

But as He was walking along on this particular day, Jesus SAW this blind man....The King of Kings noticed him and gave him His attention. He stooped down in front of the man, spat on the ground, made some mud and placed it on the man's eyes and told him

to go and wash in the Pool of Siloam. The man did as instructed and could see! Now Jesus could have healed him with only a word....but He took the time to really give this man something he had never had....undivided attention.

And you know ATTENTION is one of the most powerful forces in the world. We all crave it and will do almost anything to get it. It is valuable to us to know that someone notices...really SEES...what we are going through in life. It hurts too much to be "invisible" like this blind man.

And I think this conversation in John 9 reminds us that one of the greatest miracles of life is that God pays attention to us. Nothing we go through is hidden from His omniscient gaze. When the Psalmist exclaimed, "O Lord, You have searched me and KNOWN me" he was rejoicing in the knowledge even the smallest detail of our lives is of immense interest to God.

Think about that this morning. Jesus is aware of everything that is going on in your life. He is aware when you find yourself lost and in trouble. He is concerned when you're hurt and in pain. He pays attention when you call out to him in the dark of night.

No matter what your need, just as he did in the life of that "invisible" blind man that day, Jesus Christ, the SON of God does for you. He stops, notices us, and PAYS ATTENTION....

2. A second thing we see when we look closely at this meeting is that it is possible to have eyes that work and still be "blind."

For, there are several sighted people in this story who were oblivious to what was going on. The first were Jesus' own disciples. John records that when Jesus noticed this man, it forced His disciples to see him as well. And when they did, they asked Jesus a question: "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Now this is a strange question....I mean how could this man have caused his own blindness if he were born that way? The disciples made this odd inquiry because in those days there was a belief that it was possible to be born guilty of a specific sin.

So the disciples could see. Their eyes functioned at peak efficiency.....but they saw only an object of an interesting theological discussion. Their attempt to justify the way they ignored this man blinded them to what Jesus saw. And they were not the only sighted-but blind people-that day.

The Pharisees were blind as well...blinded by their own sense of self-righteousness. Think about it....God did a miracle that day! A man who had been born blind was given his sight! But all these near-sighted religious leaders could see was that someone had broken their Sabbath laws.

So these Pharisees looked at this formerly blind man, but they did not see a reason to rejoice. They saw only a threat to a religious system that propped up their own sense of

spiritual superiority. They were too busy attending to their own status to pay attention to God Himself, Who was at work in their midst. They could see...but they were blind.

And so, by the way, were this poor man's parents! They were summoned to testify that this was their son and that he had indeed been born blind. But they were so afraid of losing their position in the religious establishment that they too seemed blind to the blessing that their boy had received.

But you know we need to be careful in our haste to criticize all these blind people...for we too often miss the presence of God. We can become so blinded by our self-righteousness that we don't SEE our own sin and need for God's presence. In our haste to point out the sins of others, we forget our need to regularly confess our own sins. We become blind to the fact that even though people sin and suffer because of it, they still need our compassion. And sadly enough, sometimes church activity encourages and fosters this self-righteousness. For we get so involved in religion that we neglect our personal relationship with God and when that happens, we begin to forget how to listen for His still, small voice. Just because you are a follower of God doesn't mean you can't suffer from spiritual blindness.

So we need to heed God's instruction through the Psalmist and, "be still" and know that God is God because....if you don't, you run the risk of spiritual blindness.

3. And then this conversation shows us a final thing...spiritual sight is more precious than physical sight.

You see this man not only had his physical eyes opened....by the time his meeting with the Master ended his spiritual eyes were opened as well. He saw the most important thing in life....He saw Who Jesus was. And if you look closely at the story you can actually see this happen. Look at your Bibles. Verse 11 says that at first all the blind man knew was that his healer was THE MAN called Jesus. Later in verse 17, he confessed to the Pharisees that this Jesus was a PROPHET. Can you see those eyes opening? By verse 33 he had become a defender of Jesus and said that what Jesus has done showed that He was from God. And then, in his final encounter with Jesus after Jesus had heard of all the fuss his healing had caused and had gone to the trouble to find the man...after this-formerly sightless man see's Jesus as the SON OF MAN and he bows down and says, "Lord, I believe."

So, a man who had been blind from birth can miraculously see and he realizes that the sight he will prize his whole life...the most beautiful thing he will ever lay his eyes on...is the One who healed Him. And this is the greatest healing of the two. For the light that pours into the man's new eyes is nothing compared to the light that dawned in his soul. You see, the more he looked at Jesus....the more obvious it became to him that Jesus was more than a man. The tremendous thing about Jesus is that the more you look at Him, the greater He becomes. This is not the way it is with normal human beings....often the better we know a person, the more clearly we see their weaknesses, their faults,

their failings. But the more we look at Jesus the more we know that He is not just a man or even a prophet. He is Lord.

Have you seen him? Have you truly seen him? Can you say like the blind beggar, "One thing I know, I was blind but now I see!"

The good news is you do not have to continue in your blindness. Jesus Christ is here. Let him touch your eyes. Let the scales fall off and the darkness melt away. Let his light flood your soul.

One warning. Something happens to a person who has been touched by the Savior and witnessed his majesty. He becomes addicted. One glimpse of the king and you are consumed by the desire to see more of him and say more about him. Pew-warming is no longer an option. Once you have seen his face you will forever long to see it again.

I pray this morning that the Lord would open our eyes. That blurriness will be focused and darkness dispersed. That Christ will emerge from a wavy figure walking out of a desert mirage to become the touchable face of a best friend. That we will lay our lives at the pierced feet and join the once blind beggar in proclaiming, "Lord, I believe."