

## Open My Eyes Lord

Our scripture today is about Jesus healing a blind man, and the spiritual blindness of the Pharisees. In preparing today's message I came across another story I decided to share with you. The story is titled, "The Blind Men and the Elephant". This is how it goes: Once there was a village where all the inhabitants were blind. When a man passed one day riding an elephant, a group of the village men cried out asking the rider to let them touch the great beast, for though they heard about elephants, they had never been close to one.

About six of them were allowed to approach the animal, each being led to touch a different part of the body. After a time the rider left, and the blind men hurried back to their people to share the experience. "With what can you compare an elephant" the people in the crowd asked their six friends.

"I know all about elephants," cried the man who had touched the animal's side. "He is long and narrow, built like a thick wall."

"Nonsense!" shouted the man who had touched the elephant's tusk. "He is rather short, round, and smooth, but very sharp. I would compare an elephant to a spear."

A third, who had touched the ear, joined in. "It is nothing like a wall or a spear. An elephant is like a gigantic leaf, made of thick wool carpet. It moves when you touch it."

"I disagree," said the man who had handled the trunk. "An elephant is much like a large snake."

The fifth man shouted his disapproval. He had touched a leg of the great beast. "It is plain to me that none of you have described the animal accurately. It is round and reaches toward the heavens like a tree."

The sixth man, who had been placed on the elephant's back, cried out, "Can none of you accurately describe an elephant? He is like a gigantic mountain."

To this day the argument has not been resolved, and the people of that village have no idea what an elephant looks like. All too often we fail to listen to the full story, or to put all the pieces of the puzzle together to get the full picture. We hold steadfast to our own limited understanding or perspective. We blind ourselves to the truth.

The story from John reveals to us that we are all born spiritually blind. But just as powerfully it shows how God can heal our blindness, and not just our own spiritual blindness, but that of the whole world.

As we work through the scripture, we see several different levels of blindness. In verse 1 we are introduced to the “man blind from birth”. In verse 2 the disciples show blindness in asking, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” During this time period, it was common in the Jewish culture to believe calamity and suffering were the result of some great sin. But in verse 3 Jesus destroys this myth “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.”

Jesus continues speaking in verse 4, “As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

Having said this, Jesus spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam”. So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

We’ll pause a moment to look at the word Siloam. This word means “Sent.” Jesus, was sent by God to do the work of God. The blind man who is healed is then sent out to tell his family, friends and Pharisees about the truth of his healing and of Jesus. We remain spiritually blind if we fail to understand ourselves to be sent as witnesses of God’s work in our lives, and of the saving grace of Jesus.

The man who has been healed is interrogated by the Pharisees. Pharisees were an ancient Jewish political party that carefully observed the written and the oral laws. When questioned by the Pharisees, the man tells them, Jesus put mud

on my eyes, and I washed, and now I see. Some among the Jewish leaders did not believe that the man had been blind, so they called his parents to testify. Afraid of being harmed, the parents would only claim that the healed man was their son and that he had been blind since birth. They encouraged the religious authorities to question their son themselves, for he was “of age”. So the man is called before the authorities a second time.

During the second interrogation we see that the man’s spiritual blindness has also been healed. He did not know how or why he was healed, but he knew that his life had been miraculously changed, and he was not afraid to tell the truth. He tells the Pharisees, “If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” The Pharisees still refuse to see the truth about Jesus. They are blinded by jealousy of Jesus’ popularity and influence on the people.

The story closes with Jesus telling the healed man that he is indeed the Son of Man. The man replies, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshipped him. Jesus goes on to say, “For judgement I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.” Some Pharisees overhear Jesus and ask, “What? Are we blind too?” Jesus replies, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.”

The Pharisees were shocked that Jesus thought they were spiritually blind. Jesus countered by saying that it was only blindness (stubbornness and stupidity) that could excuse their behavior. The Pharisees refused to see the truth about who Jesus is and what he came to do. To those who remained open and recognized how sin had truly blinded them from knowing the truth, Jesus gave spiritual understanding and insight. But he rejected those who had become complacent, self-satisfied, and blind.

The final question of the Pharisees should cause each of to pause, and ask of ourselves, “What? Are we blind too?”

One kind of spiritual blindness is prejudice. To be prejudiced toward a person or a group of people is to “pre-judge” them. Rather than taking time to truly get to know someone, we form an opinion of someone based on our limited

or inaccurate knowledge. Remember the elephant story. While the story isn't about prejudice, it is about failure to take the time to know the whole individual. And the truth was forever hidden from the villagers. They remained not only physically blind, but academically blind. We need to guard against the spiritual blindness of prejudice.

Another kind of spiritual blindness is failure to see what is truly most important. In our story today, the Pharisees were unable to see the presence and power of God in Jesus because they were so focused on his challenge to the Sabbath laws. Jesus had healed a man on the Sabbath, on the Jewish day of worship. This healing was considered work and therefore was a violation of the commandment to keep the Sabbath holy. The Pharisees were so focused on the letter of the Law, they could not see the spirit of the Law. As a result, they missed the wonder of the miracle. They also missed Jesus' message that it is right to care for others' needs even if it involves working on a day of rest. We need to keep focused on those things that are most important, we need to keep focused on doing God's will.

If we are to be spiritually whole, and if we are going to fully see God's glory we need to open our eyes, our minds, our hearts. Openness, and receptivity to newness is a sign of sight and insight. When our eyes are closed because of prejudice, legalism, or stubbornness, we are indeed blind.

As you go through this week and the weeks ahead, give yourself an honest assessment. Look for areas or ways in your life that you are blind. Pray for God to illuminate those areas of darkness so that you may live out Ephesians 5:8 "For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light."