

Seeing and Believing

Mark 10:46-52

In our mental or spiritual life, seeing, hearing, and speaking are some of the most important activities. If one of those activities were dysfunctional, normal, daily life would hardly be sustained. Those who suffered from a dysfunction of these activities were usually excluded from society in the time of the New Testament. Those who could not see, hear, or speak were treated in society as people cursed by God. Thus, these people were suffered a triple agony—physically, socially and spiritually.

Today's scripture reading introduces a man named Bartimaeus. When Jesus and His disciples came to Jericho, a large crowd followed him. There was a beggar sitting by the roadside in the city when Jesus was about to leave town along with crowd. The beggar was a blind man. Because of his blindness, he had to sit on the roadside to beg from those who passed by. His life was one of misfortune. He was handicapped. He was isolated. He had lost his human dignity. He couldn't do anything for himself. He had to depend on others. Therefore, he was helpless and hopeless. But, when he heard that Jesus was nearby, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet because he was a man cursed by God. But, he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus heard the voice and stopped, and said, "Call him." So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He is calling you." Then, throwing his clothes aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him. The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see." "Go," said Jesus. Your faith has healed you." Then immediately, he received sight and followed Jesus along the road.

There are many stories of healing in the Bible. But, the story of this blind man is quite different from others. For one thing, here the Bible introduces this blind man by referring to him by name, "Bartimaeus." According to the legend of the early Christian church, Bartimaeus became a church leader in the early Christian church period.

A similar story of healing of a blind man is introduced in the Gospel of John, chapter nine. When Jesus went along with His disciples, they saw a by a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

After that, Jesus healed the blind man in an unusual way. He 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. However, this blind was not identified by name in the Bible.

"Common sense", common ideas, general knowledge and societal rules, and civil religion often determine what people follow and believe in life. In Biblical times, blindness had been considered a result of sin, whether that of the blind person, or perhaps even of his parents. That was the teaching of civil religion of Jews in New Testament times. That was the faith of ordinary people. That determined the social attitude toward the blind—rebuking the blind to "Be quiet!"

However, Christ and His word is truth that sets us free. The truth of Christ is the liberating power in life. Through the word of Christ, Bartimaeus was totally freed from his physical, social and spiritual shackles.

The Bible introduces two kinds of liberty or freedom: limited and temporal liberty, as well as the great and eternal freedom. "Freedom" in terms of worldly law is enjoyed by anyone not convicted as guilty of a crime and incarcerated. But, there is another kind of freedom—freedom in truth.

When I was a seminary student in Korea, (In Korea, seminary is a four year undergraduate program like the military academy) seminary was not only a place to study theology, but also the place to train all of those who would become members of the clergy for the country. Most students lived in the dormitory. In the male dormitory, there was a chapel. Every Monday to Friday, at 5: 30 A.M., there was a prayer service for all the students in the dormitory. Every student was expected to participate in the daily prayer service. The student in charge of the prayer service knocked on the door to every room in the dormitory every morning so that sleepy students were awakened. Students who went to bed late the night before weren't awakened by the knocking. So, their doors had to be knocked on very hard, very rigorously to wake them up! The sleepy students would get up and shout, "Freedom of Religion!" "Don't disturb me!"

For a few weeks, "Freedom of Religion" became a joking phrase that was used to tease the students who shouted the slogan to attempt to get out of the Morning Prayer services. Legally, we have the "freedom" of religion to choose to abide by, or not to abide by any religion, but in terms of faith, our "freedom" through Christianity results in slavery for Christ for the great freedom, the Kingdom of God. The phrase, "freedom of religion" is quoted nowhere in the Bible. Rather, the Bible says, "Those who are willing to have freedom ought to bear the yoke and follow Him." The former liberty, the "liberty" of the world is a limited

and temporal freedom, while the latter freedom is the great and eternal freedom. For the greater freedom, we are called to give up the limited liberty. For Christian freedom, we ignore religious "liberty."

There are three poignant attitudes in Christian faith I'd like to explore today.

First, Christians believe in exceptional truth in God. In life, there are not only rules in general, but also rules for exceptional situations. For example, traffic rules determine that when the traffic light is green, cars can pass, while when the traffic light is red, cars must stop. These are general traffic rules. But, when an ambulance runs through a red traffic light with its sirens blaring, the ambulance can pass, even though the light is red. This is an exception to the general rules of traffic.

Science lays out general rules of nature; however, the faith and grace of God are part of the exceptional rules of God. Theologians have said that there are two kinds of revelation that brings us awareness of God. Conscience, reason, and the natural laws are general revelations which show the hidden truth of God, while Christ is the special revelation of God who shows us salvation, truth and Kingdom of God.

Second, to pursue the grace of God, we have to give up whatever hinders faith—whatever is less valuable. To have gold in our hearts, we have to give up the silver in our hearts. To have diamond in our hearts, we have to give up the gold in our hearts. Jesus told us the Parable of the Pearl. He said, "Also, the Kingdom of heaven is like a buyer looking for fine pearls. When he finds one that is unusually fine, he goes and sells everything he has, and buys the pearl."

The blind man threw off his cloak, jumped up, and came to Jesus. Are you willing to throw off your outer garments and hurry to follow Jesus? Once, Jesus told His disciples, "Sell your outer garments and buy a sword." The "sword" meant the sword of truth of Jesus.

The Prophet Joel said, "Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God." (Joel 2:13) Our outer "garments" often defines our self image. People often judge people by their garments. But, God sees into the heart of people.

Thirdly, to live in faith, we are called not to believe in something by seeing, but rather to see that which cannot be seen, not with our eyes, but through believing. It is said, "Seeing is believing." This is a general rule. But, Jesus said to the blind man, "your faith has made you well (to see)." In other words, "Believing makes unseeing seeing." Believing gives sight to

people not only physically, but also through their minds and the spirit. If you are trying to see this world by the seeing only with your physical eyes, not trying to see life through faith, you are blind, or suffer from poor vision, spiritually speaking.

Have you had a vision check-up recently? Can you see objects clearly? Can you recognize your brothers and sisters in your neighbors? Do you have the image of Kingdom of God in your mind and heart?

A retired medical doctor who moved to Las Vegas told this story to a friend who is a previous church member of mine. One morning, the retired doctor got up and entered the bathroom. Wearing his glasses, he looked into the mirror and found that he couldn't see clearly out of his left eye. He was so shocked that he rushed to the eye doctor's office and told the doctor what happened that morning. The eye doctor looked into his eyes and said, smiling, "Your left lens has fallen out of your glasses."

Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?" Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains."

The Pharisees didn't recognize Jesus in front of them as Christ. This is spiritual blindness. We need a spiritual vision check-up to make sure that we have vision and dream for the Kingdom of God. No one here is blind among us, physically. But, if we don't have hope, vision or a dream for the kingdom of God, we are also blind men and women, spiritually, even though we publicly profess our faith. May we have the eyes to see that which is true, the vision given to us through Christ our Lord!