John 9 March 4, 2018

The Third Sunday of Lent

*The Forgiveness of Jesus, Part 3*

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Here we are already in the 3rd week of Lent, moving along together with our theme *The Forgiveness of Jesus*. Our small groups are watching extensive video teaching on a particular Scripture each week. The video teaching is provided by six different Christ-centered seminary professors, and I think each one does a great service for the Kingdom by teaching the Scriptures for this series in a way we can understand and apply to our lives. Thank you to all the small group leaders who are sifting through the information each week prior to class-time to try to make the most of the 60 minutes they have together with their group.

On our first Sunday of Lent our word of the week was ‘Repent.’ The call on our lives as disciples of Jesus is to make sure we are traveling in God’s direction, and if we’re not, Turn Around! Repent! Jesus proclaimed, *“Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand.”* Last week our word of the week was ‘Receive.’ It’s not enough to just *believe* the truths about Jesus, we have to *receive* what he died to give us in order to have a faith that truly brings us to a place of salvation from our sins. We have to receive his forgiveness, which should in turn bring us to a place of gratitude. That gratitude should then bring forth an observable faith that others can see in our actions and hear in our words. Receive the forgiveness of the Father! This week our ‘word of the week’ is Refocus.

Let us pray: *Heavenly Father, help us to hear your Word to us and for us today. Help us to set aside anything that would keep us from seeing what you want us to see for our healing and for the healing of the nations. This we pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.*

The foundational Scripture for the series for this week comes from John 9 – the whole chapter. It is the story of the man that Jesus healed who had been born blind. I’m going to pull out just a few of the verses to focus on for this message, but I encourage you all to get your Bibles out at home and read the whole chapter, allowing God to speak to you as you read and listen. It’s a fantastic story (aren’t they all?…. ☺)!

The first verse I want us to notice is verse 1. *“As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth.”* As Jesus walked along, talking to his disciples, crowds following closely, he saw a man blind from birth. This word stopped us last week, too, in Mark 2. When the four men brought their friend to Jesus and lowered him down through a hole they had dug in the roof, Jesus saw their faith. Do you remember that? He saw their faith. Now, in the middle of so much activity around him, Jesus saw this man blind from birth. Others had walked right by him for years, never really seeing him. But Jesus saw him, saw the man, & saw his need. When his disciples looked at the man, they only saw a theological question. *“Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”* Really? That’s the first thing that comes to your mind when you pass by this man blind from birth – a question about whose fault it is that he was born this way?

 Once Jesus healed the man by putting mud on his eyes and sending him to the Pool of Siloam to wash (which means ‘sent’), the man’s neighbors couldn’t even decide if it was the same guy or not. Why? Because they never really saw him in the first place! They had always just walked by him. The religious leaders looked at him and only saw how the law had been broken by Jesus who had healed him on the Sabbath. Even his own parents didn’t really see their son with first light in his eyes, they just saw their fear that they might be thrown out of the synagogue if they didn’t answer their leaders in the right way. It seems that no one hugged the man, and high-fived him as he ran through the city streets seeing everything for the first time! Everyone just saw what they wanted to see, or they saw what they had been programmed to see by past experiences – and they missed the opportunity to give thanks and praise to God for this beautiful gift of healing.

 I just love the repeated responses of the man who had been given his sight as he was questioned about his healing. His responses were so pure and simple.

* “How were your eyes opened?” *“The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.”*
* “Where is he?” *“I don’t know.”*
* “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” *“I’ve told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again?”*
* “We don’t know where this man (meaning Jesus) has come from.” *“Here is an astonishing thing! You don’t know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes.”*

Do you hear how the healed man erased the importance of the questions, and in essence,

erased the self-importance of those asking the questions? For him it came down to one thing: *“One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”* (v. 25)

 So many things can blind us to the ways that God is at work around us, and wants to work in us, and is ready to work through us. So many things can get in the way of us seeing what is right in front of us – the way to healing and wholeness.

 A woman named Rose Crawford had been blind for 50 years. "I just can't believe it!" she gasped as the doctor lifted the bandages from her eyes after her recovery from delicate surgery in an Ontario hospital. She wept for joy when for the first time in her life a dazzling and beautiful world of form and color greeted eyes that now were able to see. The amazing thing about the story, however, is that 20 years of her blindness had been unnecessary. She didn't know that surgical techniques had been developed, and that an operation could have restored her vision at the age of 30. The doctor said, "She just figured there was nothing that could be done about her condition. Much of her life could have been different."

 Friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, many of us carry burdens, and attitudes, and fears, and unhealthy attachments that give us a view of our lives and a view of the world that isn’t accurate, a view that comes from the twisted, manipulative lens of the evil one; we carry false beliefs about others, warped beliefs about ourselves, and incomplete beliefs about God and our eternal salvation through Jesus Christ. Let me give a few examples:

1. Some people who have lived with an unloving, detached, or even absent father come to believe that their Heavenly Father is also unloving, detached, or absent. This is a distorted, unbiblical picture that the devil loves to put in front of those who struggle in this way.
2. Some people believe that forgiving someone means that they are saying what that person did was okay. That’s not true or biblical. Forgiving others is not about others at all. Forgiving others is about us and our obedience to God’s command to forgive as God in Christ has forgiven us. (More about this in the coming weeks).
3. People who have lived through abusive situations come to believe that it’s their fault they are being abused – that it’s their behavior that needs punished – that somehow they deserve this kind of treatment. This is not true and is unbiblical. All people have worth and value and deserve to live in safety wherever they live.
4. Some people believe that the phrase “God doesn’t give you more than you can handle” is in the Bible and cling to that in times of trouble instead of just clinging to God.
5. Some people believe that once you put your faith in Jesus your life will be free of trouble. Well what happens when a Christian has trouble? What happens to faith then?

These distorted views affect us, they affect the people around us, and they affect our witness to the world. How do we find healing in the truth so that our witness can be most effective and our lives be most productive for the Kingdom? How do we find healing? How do we see clearly?

First of all, in humility and faith, we have to recognize our blindness. We may not know exactly what we can’t see, but we have to start by confessing that we know we don’t see all things the way we should. We don’t see ourselves the way we should. We don’t see others the way we should. The religious leaders in our story were blind because they thought they knew everything, that they saw everything clearly. They said to Jesus, *“Surely we are not blind, are we?”* But they were blind. They were blinded to the gift of sight and salvation that was standing right in front of them! So, first of all we have to confess that we need to see what we can’t see that Jesus wants us to see. That’s a prayer, folks. That’s a prayer of confession & openness to revelations from our Creator for our good and for his glory.

Next, we need to hear this truth: Jesus sees you. He sees you. He doesn’t look past you. He doesn’t look around you to see someone more in need. He sees you. He sees your needs, the visible and the invisible. He sees you and he loves you. He sees you, he loves you, and he wants to clear things up for you. He wants to help you refocus so that you can live freely within the covenant of grace. He comes to you, he sees you, he loves you, and he offers you new sight today, and every day. The unfortunate part of that good news is that the journey to clearer sight may be uncomfortable, messy, and a bit muddy. And others around you might not understand. They (and the voices within you) might try to talk you out of it. “You’re fine just the way you are.” But that’s because they don’t see you the way you need to be seen in order to bring you to deep healing and fully restored sight.

2 Corinthians 4:4 declares, *“The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”* The devil lives to keep unbelievers from becoming believers. He lives to keep us, as believers, from seeing or responding to the spiritual needs of the people around us who don’t believe. He does everything he can to keep us from inviting people to come be part of our church family. When’s the last time we invited someone to come with us who we know doesn’t already attend a church? He lives to keep us from living beautiful lives of faith and hope before the people around us so that unbelievers don’t see anything in our lives that is at all attractive. Let’s face it, when it comes right down it, sometimes we as believers don’t look or sound much different than those who don’t believe.

May our hearts be open to God’s refocusing work – work that would bring forth personal transformation and healing – and then through us work that would bring forth transformation and healing for our community, our nation, and the whole wide world.

Let us pray: *Almighty God, the God who sees, who knows, who loves, who opens ears, who opens hearts, who opens eyes, we come. We come before you and we remain still. Holy Spirit, speak to us. Show us where we have been blind. We don’t want to be like some of the Pharisees. We don’t want to be stubborn, stiff-necked people who think we’ve got it all right. We know we don’t. We know we can’t. We are still so entangled by our sin. Forgive us. Open us anew to your voice of instruction. Grant us courage that we might not turn away in fear. Help us. (silence). You gave everything, Jesus, so that we could live free. Your life in exchange for ours. Oh, fill us anew with thankfulness, with hearts bursting with love and gratitude, with joy that cannot be stolen, and confidence in you that brings unshakeable peace. As we come to your Table today, we pray that the bread we break and the cup we pour may be for us a true communion of the broken body and the shed blood of our Savior Jesus Christ. May we truly enter in and see the love that changes everything. Through Christ and for his sake we pray, Amen.* Let us stand and sing:

Behold the Lamb who bears our sins away, slain for us - and we remember
The promise made that all who come in faith find forgiveness at the cross.
So we share in this bread of life, and we drink of His sacrifice
As a sign of our bonds of peace around the table of the King.

The body of our Savior Jesus Christ, torn for you - eat and remember
The wounds that heal, the death that brings us life paid the price to make us one.
So we share in this bread of life, and we drink of His sacrifice
As a sign of our bonds of love around the table of the King.

The blood that cleanses every stain of sin, shed for you - drink and remember
He drained death’s cup that all may enter in to receive the life of God.
So we share in this bread of life, and we drink of His sacrifice
As a sign of our bonds of grace around the table of the King.

And so with thankfulness and faith we rise to respond, - and to remember
Our call to follow in the steps of Christ as His body here on earth.
As we share in his suffering, we proclaim Christ will come again!

And we’ll join in the feast of heaven around the table of the King.

(Getty Music)