

The Light of the World

Our second Scripture reading is John 9:1-7. Jesus illustrates another self-identification with an *I Am* saying. Here Jesus says, "I am the light of the world." After preaching at the Feast of Tabernacles, which is a celebration, not only of God's provision of water, but also of the light of God's presence with the Israelites in the wilderness, Jesus heals a blind man, demonstrating not only his compassion, but also as a sign-miracle of his being the Light of the World.

Reading **John 9:1-7**...

9 As (Jesus) walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³ Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶ When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, ⁷ saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

Kent Hughes states that there are several ophthalmologists in his church in Wheaton, Illinois, whom he asked if they knew of anyone blind from birth whose sight was restored. The only instance of the restored sight to the congenitally blind was in a case of cataracts at birth, and in that instance sight was not completely restored. Jesus healed many blind people during his earthly ministry, since blindness was common and rendered its victims helpless. There was no Braille language and there were no seeing-eye dogs. The blind were reduced to beggary, and were on the very bottom of the social scale as dependents on alms-givers.

The disciples of Jesus shared the same prejudices toward the handicapped as did the culture as a whole. It was assumed that the less fortunate were the victims of someone's sins, either his/hers or the sins of the parents of the handicapped. Some rabbinical schools taught that a birth defect of deformity could be the result of the sins of a fetus while in the womb! What Jesus does is lift us beyond simplistic speculation about causes of handicapped conditions and misfortunes. Jesus looks beyond cause to purpose, saying that God can take misfortune and tragedy and turn them into occasions for glorifying God. In the case of the blindness of this man God can be glorify himself through his healing power.

In the midst of their sacred Feast of Tabernacles and procession of lights, which had attracted a great crowd of pilgrims, Jesus spoke up and declared himself to be a greater light than either the star that attracted the wise men, or the magnificent lamps of their display of lights in the temple. Jesus attracted the

crowd to himself as the light of the world. He was again making a huge claim for himself, which the religious leaders, who rejected his claims, would have thought outlandish. Isaiah prophesied that the messiah would herald a new age of light that would dawn upon a world of darkness (Is. 9:2). And Jesus here before his critics and enemies says, "I am the light of the world!" No wonder CS Lewis said that Jesus is who he says or he's a liar, a lunatic or a legend!

As the light of the world Jesus attracts. The holy, sinless Savior, draws to himself sinful people. His attraction is because, in addition to being perfectly holy and absolutely sinless, Jesus is also perfect love and compassion. His enemies, who were the religious authorities, were offended by him because he uncovered their sin and made them realize the futility of their religious works. He challenged their exclusive claims and welcomed into the Kingdom those the religious authorities had rejected as inferior and unworthy.

This man who had been blind from birth was drawn to Jesus, who came to him to heal him and to make him whole. The greater miracle for this man was not the giving of physical sight, but the gift of spiritual insight that led him to become an eternal child of God. Jesus attracted this man to himself as the light of the world, and today, through the Word, the Scriptures, he continues to attract people to himself. It's not to religion or to Christianity that people are attracted savingly, but to Jesus alone. It's the work of Jesus that gives the light of life, the life of salvation. About his death on a cross, Jesus said, "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." The cross has a saving attraction. Even today, Muslims around the world, in countries that may be in a hostile relationship to the US, are coming to faith in Jesus. Years ago this was seen in the response in the Islamic world to the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*. They are attracted to a God who would so love them that he would die for them.

Light exposes the darkness and what lurks in the darkness. Back in my church convention-attending days, I made reservations to stay in a hotel on a beach in Miami. The brochures I'd received in the mail pictured a beautiful and luxurious hotel. I arrived dead-tired and late at night, checked into the hotel, and crashed fast asleep. Upon waking in the morning, as the bright sunlight shone into the hotel room, I was horrified to see how unclean was the room, which I soon abandoned for the first available room I could find. God's light from Jesus exposes the soiled condition of our sinful hearts that have long lay in the darkness of spiritual ignorance and neglect. When Jesus speaks his word into our hearts, he exposes the ugliness.

In giving us an exhortation to be strong in the Lord amidst spiritual warfare, Paul says "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:12). When Jesus announced himself to be the light of the world he knew what he was up against. Heinous

crimes are evidence of satanic darkness that can terrorize. Such darkness is the full effect of the rejection of the light of God.

The next to the last plague in Egypt (Ex. 10:21) was a plague of darkness that came upon Pharaoh and his people. The Scriptures say it was a darkness that could be felt. This was not just the absence of light, but also the presence of evil. Perhaps you have felt this kind of darkness is in your life, your workplace, or perhaps in your home. Jesus, the light of the world, desires to expose and drive away that darkness. In John's Gospel the darkness Jesus encounters is primarily among the religious people and their leaders, exactly the ones expected to be enlightened about spiritual truth. They became his worst enemies, so blinded were they to the truth.

One can subtly begin to separate what we know from what we are, and become deceived about our true condition. Knowing about God isn't the same as knowing God. Religion without relationship is a dangerous thing. Spiritual darkness is all around us, and only the grace of God, through the Holy Spirit can drive away the darkness. Paul says, "God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). Jesus healed the blind man's eyes but also his heart. He became a worshiper and follower of Jesus. How his heart stands in stark contrast to the hearts of Jesus' enemies! Jeremiah speaks of the deceitful and deceived nature of the heart:

"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9).

As Jesus explained to Nicodemus (or John the Evangelist said upon reflection), "And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil....But whoever does what is true comes to the light..." (3:19-21). The light of Jesus continues to shine in us to expose more of the lingering darkness. In his first letter, John writes about the incongruity of a child of God's continuing to walk in the darkness of sin, loveless-ness and unbelief. As we grow in our relationship of obedience to Jesus, we have more of the light of the Holy Spirit, and more of his anointing and joy and fellowship with him and others (1 Jn. 1:5-10; 2:7-14, etc.).

Years ago, a missionary friend took me on an overnight to a cabin he has built in Naivasha, Kenya. It's in an isolated area, on a lake filled with hippos, which are the animals most dangerous to humans in all of Africa. He took me out that night riding in his SUV, as I held the spotlight out to the top of the auto, looking for exotic animals. In addition to hyenas and other dangerous creatures, we knew that the area was infested with leopards, and pythons, as well as hippos that come out of the lake to graze in the pastures at night.

To spare you more details, Vance drove his SUV into a ditch, and here we were, two miles away from the house and the Africans who could help us get the car out of the ditch. All we had was a flashlight, and so we walked fast, talking as we walked in order to hopefully scare dangerous and, hopefully shy animals away. We made it back, as you can see, and the Africans rescued the SUV. Our biggest scare was the sudden sound of a thundering herd before our path. Thankfully, it was a herd of zebras and not hippos. The flashlight gave the light we needed to get home safely. Next morning, as we walked near the pathway we took the night before, we saw leopard tracks. I was actually glad our flashlight had shown us only what we needed to see to get home!

The light of the world, Jesus, shows us little by little what we need to see. If we could see all the dangers and threats around us, we would be overwhelmed and scared to death! It's enough for us that Jesus walks through the wilderness with us and is there to lead us. He's gentle with us and will not overwhelm us or place more on us than we can bear. He guides us throughout our pilgrimage and exposes what we need to avoid.

Jesus replied to his disciples that this blind man's life was about to achieve an eternal purpose (3). God as redeemer could take a tragic life and give it eternal purpose. So, his blindness would become an occasion for God to glorify himself through the blind man's receiving his sight. The disciples wanted to dwell on the causes of this man's blindness. Jesus wanted them and he wants us to stop dwelling on the causes that have led us to where we are today, with our present circumstances. He wants us to open our eyes to see what is his purpose for us. His purpose is to be glorified in our lives.

God illuminates our hearts by the light of the world, Jesus, and gives us the gift of spiritual sight that we might be truly converted and bring glory to God. The purpose of this miracle was not to make this man's life better. In fact, to be truly converted guarantees suffering and being persecuted for your faith. It isn't easy being a faithful Christian in a dark world. So, our purpose is not in living an easy life. Our purpose is to become worshipers who glorify God by living for him lives that reflect his light in us and by joining him on his mission.

The man Jesus sighted/healed became a source of glory to God. God's work was on display in his life for all to see. Jesus says this is to be our calling as lights in the world, and letting our lights shine before others, "That they may see our good deeds and praise (our) Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:14-16).

We also glorify God as we join him on mission in a world of darkness. Jesus told his disciples and us that we must do the work of the one who sent him as long as it is day. "Night is coming when no one can work. While I am in the world," said Jesus, "I am the light of the world" (4-5). Rescue operations are not casual events that accommodate our schedules, but must be done now, while the light illuminates.

We can all enter into the eternal purposes of God and join him in his mission as the light of the world. With the blind man, Jesus looked beyond the cause of his blindness and saw a purpose in his life—the display of the work of God (Jn. 9:3). Is the light of God, the light of the world, shining in and through your life?

We've all sung some of the songs of Fanny Crosby, a prolific songwriter of the 19th Century. Listen to her testimony expressing gratitude for the medical malpractice that cause her blindness as a baby:

...I know, although it may have been a blunder on the physician's part, it was no mistake of God's. I verily believe it was His intention that I should live my days in physical darkness, so as to be better prepared to sing His praises and incite others so to do. I could not have written thousands of hymns—many of which, if you will pardon me for repeating it, are sung all over the world— if I had been hindered by the distractions of seeing all the interesting and beautiful objects that would have been presented to my notice.

Fanny Crosby was undistracted by lesser lights, and had the light of Christ to illumine her heart and mind. We're given the light of Christ in us, enabling us to see, and also giving us light to share. May we as well glorify God with the light he has given!