

March 19, 2023
[based on John 9:1-41]

Don't Judge a Book By It's Cover

Don't touch. Don't hug. Stand 6 ft apart or at least 3 ft. apart. We've heard these words many times in the last years.

Today, many are losing hope, and the joy of life is ebbing away, as they seek to battle the many challenges which they face. Memories of good times are fading, while the expectation of experiencing new ones is gradually disappearing. However, when persons are introduced to Jesus, when they have an opportunity to meet Jesus, hope springs alive once more.

Today's message will be a little different; it is from the perspective of the blind person, in what might be his own words. Imagine yourself telling your story to the world. Let's listen to that blind man...

I was born blind. I had never seen the light. I had never seen my mother's face nor my father's. I had no idea what colours looked like. All I was familiar with was darkness. People would look upon my parents as sinners. They would accuse them of having done something wrong which resulted in me being born blind...that God had made me blind, in order to punish them for their sins. I was their punishment.

This was a burden I lived with from childhood. As I gained understanding, I realized that my parents were looked down upon because of me. Their lives were limited, because of me. As they grew older, they worried about what would become of me when they passed on.

They had to take me everywhere. I had no dreams for myself...no aspirations. I had resigned myself to that fate. No hope of becoming anyone of significance. I will live and die as "the blind man." You did not have to know my name. Just the "blind man".

I sometimes wondered if anyone would want to marry a blind man, and would I have children. My future was bleak, one in which I always had to have someone to depend on. It was frightening.

One day I was standing near the temple while Jesus was passing by. He took some clay and anointed my eyes and he said to me, "Go and wash in the pool of Siloam." I did as Jesus suggested. I went to the pool and washed my face. Let me tell you, after I washed my face, light flooded my eyes and collided with my brain. I struggled to make sense of all that my eyes were telling me. I saw such strange objects. I saw men and women, boys and girls. I saw green trees, stone houses, dusty streets. I saw, I saw, I saw!!

I was astonished. I was so happy. I was exhilarated. I could not believe it, a whole new arena was opened up to me. I was experiencing "UNBELIEVABLE SIGHTS, INDESCRIBABLE FEELINGS". I jumped and pranced and shouted and screamed. People saw me and asked, "Isn't that the guy who was born blind? How is it that he can jump and dance and run as if he can see?"

A crowd soon gathered around me. Somebody asked "How is it that you can see now?"

I said, "A man called Jesus took some clay and anointed my eyes." He said to me, "Go to the pool of Siloam and wash", and so I went to the pool and washed. Now I can see. Then they asked me, "Where is he?" But I did not know.

These people were not rejoicing with me. They did not share in my joy. They had no idea of the impact of this experience on my memories. This moment was burnt into my brain forever. All they wanted to know, was the reason for my weird behaviour.

Paul says, in Romans 12:15, "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep!" My brethren seemed only to be interested in the source of my good fortune, perhaps to see if they too could benefit in some way.

We must not behave in this way. We must be able to share the joys and sadness of others, to empathise and have compassion, and at the same time, celebrate when need be. We must break the strangle-hold of selfish thoughts and desires.

When my answers did not satisfy them, they took me to the authorities. Instead of allowing me to celebrate my new-found freedom, these people sought to dampen my enthusiasm for praising God. People will always judge you based on *their* experience. They have not walked in your sandals, nor felt your pain; they do not share your memories, but they believe they know how you should behave when God blesses you.

Brothers and sisters, we must continually look for things to be thankful for, and to celebrate. Life is far too short to live in a moody state.

It was a Sabbath day. The Pharisees took their turn now in asking me questions: "How did you receive your sight? What did he do to you? What do you think of the man who healed you?"

Not satisfied with my answers, they called my parents to verify that I was their son, who was born blind. My parents verified it and they came back to me again. What was the purpose of all this? It was because the miracle was done by Jesus, and they were looking for some reason, some pretext, to disparage Him.

All they could focus on was that he healed me on the Sabbath day! None of them sought to express pleasure with me, to consider how *I* must feel now that I could see. Before today I was physically blind, but today I can see, yet these men **choose** to be blind. I did not have the education they had. I was not as familiar with the temple worship, the Levitical Law, ceremonial offerings and sacrifices as they were. But I knew that Jesus had healed me.

They turned to me again saying "Give God the glory. We know that this man is a Sinner." Sometimes we allow our minds to be filled with bitterness and hatred. Our memories are dark and sinister such that even in good, we seek to find evil. We feel that we are so important, that no one deserves praise except us. They could not deny the miracle, so they chose to attack the man.

"Well," I said, "I don't know if he is a sinner or not, but I know one thing that once I was blind but now I see." I said "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again, or do you want to become one of his disciples?"

The people turned on me and began to revile me and criticize me, as if they knew me. They said "You are his disciple, but we are Moses' disciples. We know that God spoke to Moses. As for this fellow, we do not even know where he is from."

They said, that since the world began, it has been unheard of, that anyone open the eyes of one who was born blind. I retorted, "If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." They were stunned. They knew this. But they had no answer. Instead of taking off their 'blindners', they turned to me with ridicule and said "**You** were completely born in sin and *you* are trying to teach us?" And they cast me out of the synagogue.

It was then that I saw Jesus. He asked me if I believed in the Son of God. I asked him, "Who is he Lord, that I may believe in him?"

He said to me, "You have both seen him and it is he who is now talking with you."

I said to him, "Lord I believe", and I worshipped him. He could have just spoken and allowed me to see. But he chose a longer route, increasing my suspense and allowing me to exercise my faith.

My friends, Jesus is a master at creating exciting moments and lasting memories. As we struggle amid the many crises of today - floods, storms, fires, violence which causes so much loss and pain, it is wonderful to know that God is still at work. He is the one who can use us to create lasting memories in the lives of those we meet.

The good news is that God is still in charge, and He is available to anyone who call on Him, regardless of their appearance, infirmity or social standing. Let's not judge a book by its cover. Let's see what's inside.

Let us pray:

*Dear Lord Jesus, help us to embrace your new covenant of love and to look for the best in people, because together, as Christians, we **can** make this world a better place; we **can** overcome natural blindness, and spiritual blindness.*

Even we, can be a light in this world, and, with the help of the Holy Spirit we will never fail. Amen