Eyes of Faith

Based on John 12:20-43

Preached on March 29, 2015

Passion/Palm Sunday

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Our Gospel reading from John chapter 12 is an account of Jesus words after he enters into Jerusalem as their King to die for them. And he words are pure theology. By that I mean, they tell us the mind and reasoning of God. They tell us how God thinks. And we have to be told how God thinks, because it doesn't make sense to human reason. That's why we need God's Word, because we are all by nature blind to the things of God.

Jesus gives sight to the blind. That's what the messiah does, so often in many of his healing miracles. And it's because blindness is the perfect metaphor to describe the state of mankind. We are born blind, unable to see to perceive the things of God, as He would have us see them.

2 Corinthians 4:4, "**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**."

Hear this parable: There was a man who woke up in the middle of the night to find his apartment pitch black. He got out of bed and groped his way to the light switch, but when he flipped it…no light. So he got a lightbulb and replaced the one in his lamp, still no light. He cautiously felt his way down to the basement and flipped the breaker…still…no light. He called the power company who proceeded to check the transformer and told him that the power was up and running. Finally he found a match, sat down and struck it, he heard the spark, he felt the heat, he smelled the sulfur and finally realized, he was blind.

By our own nature, by our own worldly wisdom and understanding, by our hearts and appetites, by our five senses including sight, We are blind, unable to see things the way God sees them. And so it is the scripture says of us in 2 Corinthians 5:7, "**We walk by faith, not by sight.**" Ladies and Gentlemen, You are born into a world of darkness, and the way of the world is to jump from this new fad and fashion to the next, as if groping for a light switch. But the light switch won't help, you are blind, blind to the things of God.

And so our Gospel reading begins with some Greeks who want to "see" Jesus. They want to see him, and so Philip and Andrew tell Jesus this. And Jesus, he doesn't get up and go strutting on the catwalk. They want to "see" Jesus, so what does he do. He teaches them theology, that is, he teaches them the mind of God, which cannot be seen by the eyes, but only by faith. And faith comes by hearing the word of God. So Jesus teaches them about the glory of his death.

Imagine you were there when Jesus was crucified. What would your eyes see. They would see a man hanging, bleeding and dying on a cross. What would you conclude? Your eyes would tell you this man is weak, and powerless. You would reason and deduce He must've done something wrong, and now he's paying the price for his crimes. And then you look at the sign above his head that says, "King of the Jews." And so what would you think? What would you do? You'd probably stand there with a beer next to your friends saying to one another, "This guy...I heard he said he was king of the Jews. That he was even going to destroy the temple and raise it up again. That he claimed to be the Son of God. If he is the Son of God, why doesn't he save himself?" Maybe, after shaking your head and pontificating to one another about how the world's going to hell in a handbasket (because you're not in charge of course). About how your taxes are so high and you have to double bolt the doors at night because of lowlifes like him. You might get a bit cocky, and, lost in the moment, you might go to mock this gallileean on the cross, saying "Hail king of the Jews", while your friends guffaw in derisive scorn at and before the God of the universe.

The Greeks wish to "see" Jesus and so Jesus teaches them theology, he teaches them the way God sees things. He teaches them how his Father will glorify him by lifting him up on cross to die. God thinks that the death of his Son on a cross is actually a glorious sight. And when you see Jesus on a cross, suffering, sighing, bleeding dying, I can guarantee, your worldly wisdom is not going to interpret it that way. You cannot reason your way to the glory of the cross; you have to be told about it, and you have to believe it because God said it.

Jesus begins his theology with these words, "The hour has come for the son of man to be glorified." And the mind of God is that the Son of Man will be glorified in his death. How can this be? Who can understand this? And so Jesus gives an example, to illustrate to the blind how it can be that death can actually lead to abundant life. "Truly, truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies it bears much fruit." You see, in the case of the seed and the Son of Man, in both cases, death actually produces more life.

One of the earliest Christian symbols for the resurrection was the butterfly. It's because a caterpillar must die, even make his own cocoon tomb, before he transfigures into a glorious butterfly. But here's the thing, if you watch the whole thing, not knowing about the "theology" of metamorphasis, your eyes and your heart would tell you that the caterpillar is dying. Unless you were taught ahead of time that this is what caterpillars do in order to be reborn, you would never imagine it. You'd never expect it. You'd never believe it. In fact, your eyes and your heart would prepare you for the opposite conclusion, that this caterpillar's a goner.

So too you look at the cross with Christ dying on it, and your eyes and your heart would conclude the opposite of what's really happening. These Greeks that want to see Jesus, he teaches them, and the disciples, and you and me what really happens when the Son of Man is lifted up on the cross. It looks like defeat, but that’s because we are blind. We have our reason and our senses but they are of no help here. We need to be told what God sees on the cross; we have to be told that this death is simply a metamorphasis because we'd never believe it otherwise.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are born blind, and yet God would have us see. Jesus came to teach us the meaning of the cross before he died on it, so that we would believe what really happened there. That is why Jesus came, to teach theology. But the people still didn’t believe. He did many signs and wonders before their eyes, but, our Gospel says, they still did not believe his theology. They saw the signs, but they did not hear what they meant.

Our Gospel quotes Isaiah, “Lord who has believed what he has *heard* from us, and to whom has the arm of the lord been revealed.” Jesus did many signs before the eyes of people, but the signs never produced faith, because faith does not come through seeing. Romans 10 says Faith comes through hearing and hearing the word of God. But Isaiah prophesied that no one has “believed” what he “heard” from us. And so, Isaiah continues to say, God takes away their sight and he hardens their heart, so that they don’t turn to God.

Faith does not come by the senses, or understanding or feelings, because these things are blind to the things of God. The glory of God cannot be seen by mortal eyes.

But the fact that mankind is born blind to the things of God, does not stop us from trying to see. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were born with sight. They knew the things of God because they had his Word. But Satan blinded her. He didn't gouge out her eyes, or anything like that. Much worse, he took the word of God away from her. He twisted Gods Word, misinterpreted it. God said, "Do not eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, for that fruit means death." Satan, through silver tongued lies got her to doubt God's Word, and regard it as an unreliable uide. He got her to believe that she was blind, and that the fruit forbidden by God would make her "see" the things of God. Listen to Genesis 3: **4**But the serpent said to the woman, “**You will not surely die. 5For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil**.”

Her eyes were already opened. She had the word of God, and by faith in it, Eve had the mind of God. But Satan could sell ice to an Eskimo, because he actually deceived Eve into thinking that she was blind, when she had the word, which is a lamp and a light. He turned her away from the Word of God which left her to struggle to see by her own senses. Genesis 3 continues:

**6So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. 7Then the eyes of both were opened...**

When the Word was taken from her, Eve had to judge things by her eyes, her understanding, and her appetites. And so, blind to the mind of God, she ate, gave some to Adam who ate. And at that point on their eyes were opened to the world and thus closed to God.

We have eyes for the world and hearts for the world. We see and seek glory from men more than glory from God. And so God hides himself from our eyes and our hearts, so that we only come to him in faith in his Words alone. Isaiah says that God has “**blinded the eyes of unbelievers, and hardened their hearts, lest they see with their eyes and understand with the heart, and turn and God would heal them**.”

In the Garden of Eden, After Adam and Eve lost their original righteousness, they were banished. The reason for that is given in, Genesis 3, **22Then the Lord God said,  “Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—” 23therefore theLord God sent him out from the garden of Eden…**

If Adam and Eve would eat from the tree of life in their sinful condition, they would be condemned to hell forever. In the same way, if we turn to God by the sight of our eyes, and the understanding of our hearts, Isaiah says, God would heal us as we are. If we would access God without his Word, we would be lost forever, condemned to the hell of his wrath, without hope. So God blinded our eyes, and hardened our hearts, so that all we have left is to hear the Word and believe it.

I remember when I was a vicar, I was preaching and I would look out and

Remember friends, God doesn’t want to heal you the way you are. He loves you, therefore he wants to kill you. Jesus says, “**For he who loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.**” That’s the way God, thinks, that’s the way God works, that’s theology, to know the way God thinks by studying his word, because we can’t know how God thinks by studying the world. And his world says that the eyes we have now can’t see him, so he blinds them. He says the heart we have now can’t understand him, so he hardens it. He says that the body we have right now can’t live with him, so he kills it. He does not want us to live forever with cursed eyes, evil hearts, and weakened bodies, so he kills them, Just as he promised in Eden “If you eat of the fruit you shall surely die.”

God announces in Deuteronomy 32:39,

**39 “ ‘See now that *[h](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Dt32.39)*I, even I, am he,**

**and there is no god beside me;**

[***i***](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Dt32.39)**I kill and I make alive;**

[***j***](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Dt32.39)**I wound and I heal;**

**and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.**

When Samson fell into sin with Delilah, his reward was her betrayal. He was captured, made a slave and his eyes were gouged out. His heart, his freedom, and his eyes led him away from God, and once they were taken away, he could finally see the things of God, and with his final act, by faith, he destroyed more of God’s enemies than he did in a lifetime. When Saul had persecuted the church in rage, He was struck blind by the living and glorified Christ. He went on to Damascus, to the house of Annanias and the lord gave him new eyes, and he became Paul and he was Baptized.

**"**[**1**](http://biblehub.com/romans/6-1.htm)**What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?**[**2**](http://biblehub.com/romans/6-2.htm)**By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?**[**3**](http://biblehub.com/romans/6-3.htm)**Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?**[**4**](http://biblehub.com/romans/6-4.htm)**We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life"** (Romans 6:1-4).

Does Baptism look like a death and a resurrection? Not to the eyes of men. But neither does the cross look like something to glory in. For you are blind by nature, and no matter how much you explain colour to a blind man, he will never see it. Likewise, no matter how much you explain baptism, the cross, the lord’s supper to the unbeliever, he will never understand. Because only the Spirit understands the things of God, and only the Word of God gives the Holy Spirit who makes us see things the way God sees them. Not with eyes of the flesh, but with eyes of faith. To have the mind of Christ...that is our comfort today. Paul says in our Epistle lesson, "Have this *mind* among yourselves." A mind imparted to you. A mind that does not think the way you think, a mind that knows what Christ did on the cross.

"**Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has exalted him" (Philippians 2:5-9).**

And so God exalts us, not when we understand his mysteries with our eyes nor our hearts, but but by simply believing His words. He says "You are righteous", you are righteous. He says, "You are forgiven", you are forgiven. He says, You will be with Him in Paradise, it is true, for God cannot lie. And your salvation is secure in the one who will never leave you nor forsake you, Jesus Christ, King of Glory.

In the cross of Christ I glory,
 Tow’ring o’er the wrecks of time.
All the light of sacred story
 Gathers round its head sublime.

("In the Cross of Christ I Glory, LSB Hymn #427)