

False Religion John 9:13-23

As we come to this text we come to an amazing passage of Scripture all orchestrated by God. We see that the beggar has to be at the gate, and he has to be crying out in such a way that it gets the attention of Jesus' disciples so that they ask who sin, him or his parents. And we see that it has to be a particular day and a particular time, and we realize that Jesus heals this man by the will of God. God's sovereignty is all over the situation. We praise Him and glorify Him that all through the gospel we see God's guiding hand either behind the scene or in the forefront through these miracles.

And certainly God gives so many blessings through his sovereign and good hand, and we should rejoice in them. And I want you to picture a certain situation. And here it is: someone outside of Christ has been coming out to church. And the church starts to pray for this individual and testify to him and love him. And then the light breaks through the darkness and God wonderfully saves this person and there is a joy and excitement that he cannot contain. It is just coming out of him. He wants to learn of Christ, serve Christ and be with his people. The signs of new life are all over him.

But here is the question I have: where will this person get the most encouragement in his life and where will he get the most discouragement in his life? And I think the answer we would give just off the top of our head is that he would get the most encouragement from believers or the church and the most discouragement from old acquaintances and friend who really do not want him to go in that direction. But such is not always the case. Many times those who profess to be religious or Christian can be the greatest hinderances to those who have come to faith. It could be simply that we doubt God's power to save that individual, and want to see them jump through a whole bunch of moral hoops to prove they have come to Christ before we ever praise God. And in our critical spirit we just chalk it up to being discerning. It could be that we lay a whole bunch of rules and regulations on their shoulders and make it seem like there is no joy in following Christ but only a burden. It could be that we speak and talk critical of others in the church, and the whole message of salvation by grace and that we are all undeserving starts to lose its glory. And many times the most discouraging people are the very people that should be the most encouraging.

And here we have seen and beheld a glorious miracle and then the very people that should have been the most encouraging enter in, and that was the religious leaders or the Pharisees, who were known for their walk with God and taking the things of God seriously. And it is so easy to pick on the Pharisees, but let me ask you: how critical are you in the work of God in the lives of others? I remember talking to this one person who wrote off an entire church that was biblical and godly. No one is growing and no one is really serving God. But if others are believers in Christ, then that process of sanctification is going on in their lives. There are areas that they are being changed into the image of Christ. It does not mean that they are perfect and never need correction or rebuke, but so often we are good at seeing the sin in others but not what God is doing. When we are not encouraging and edifying others, then we miss the work of God in the lives of others that is worth celebrating. And I hope as we look at this text tonight we see how ugly the sin of the Pharisees is, and by seeing it we see

that this really is a false religion. But it is the same with us. When we are questioning constantly any advance that individuals have or not celebrating the blessings of others ours is a false Christianity. It is doubting or casting aspersion on the work of God. It has somehow been altered along the way, and it has much in line with the attitude of the Pharisees who could not see the obvious: and that is the glorious work of Jesus Christ. Please, do not miss the work of Christ but celebrate that work. Look for it in your brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. I want us to see a couple of things in this passage as a warning for us not to be like the Pharisees.

1. I want us to see they brought him to people who should known better. Vv. 13-17

I am always amazed at the amount of biblical knowledge that we have today. It is incredible when you think about in your Christian life how many sermons that you have heard, how many chapters of the Bible you have had the privilege of reading, how many articles or books or podcasts that you have had in your life. We have had more Bible intake than any generation before us. And that is an understatement. And that is what is so sad about this situation. We should know better and should respond better in our lives, whether it is a blessing that is brought to someone we might not like, or whether it is adversity in our own lives. We should respond according to what we know about God and about what he says about ourselves. But so often he doesn't even enter the picture.

So in the last paragraph, we see that the neighbours or those from Jerusalem recognized the man that was born blind and that he could see. You can imagine the crowd that drew around him, and even the excitement in the air. Some knew him right away, others had a hard time believing that this was him. So in order to authenticate whether this was a true act of God or true miracle, they take this man to the religious authorities that are trained in the Word of God. But I cannot overestimate the excitement and sense of awe and wonder that must have been in this crowd.

So again, look at what they do in verse 13, **"They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind."** This was actually a smart move by the people. Should they be excited? Should they trust in Jesus? Enter the Pharisees. And since these were the experts, they should have taken this miracle and examined whether this was a valid miracle and work of God by the word of God. Was this a miracle? Was there any earthly or any other explanation that could be given of why this man received sight? The religious leaders know that there is coming a day and there is coming one that will give salvation to his people, but also as Isaiah 35:5 says, **"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped."** This work that will be done will be God's work and his alone.

But there was also another test. Not only was this a legitimate miracle. We realize that there magicians in Pharaoh's court copied many of the miracles that were done by Moses. There was another test, and that test is given in Deuteronomy 13:1-3, **"If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, 'Let us go after other gods,' which you have not known, 'and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you love the LORD your God**

with all your heart and with all your soul.” So it is not enough just to have a miracle, but you have to come with the right doctrine. And this is where they should have investigated Jesus. They should have looked at his teaching of the Law and what he said and did. But amazingly the crowd brings this man to the religious educated and they do not follow the Law to ascertain who Jesus is. It was quite clear in the Scriptures as far as what they should do. And rather than seeking Jesus, there are two things that these religious leaders do. One is they put this man on trial, and the second is they get hung up on a technicality.

Look at the next verse, **“Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes.”** The religious leaders do not investigate first of all the miracle itself or Jesus’ doctrine and teaching but the timing of the miracle. The reader of the gospel can see the problem right away. Back in chapter 5 Jesus had healed a paralytic who was in that condition for 38 years. Definite miracle. He is even able to pick up his bed and walk home. The problem for the Pharisees was the timing of that miracle. And listen to John 5:16, **“And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.”** How dare he heal someone on their Sabbath. And God had given the Sabbath as a day of rest and reflection and refreshment. But for the Jews, in many ways this was the most hated day of the week because of all the restrictions that were placed on them. It was taught in Exodus 20:10, **“you shall not do any work.”** And the key word here is work. They defined work as not just ceasing to go into the field, or not doing what you did for the other six days of the week, but ceasing from every activity, even activities of mercy to other individuals.

Now, notice what it says here in verse 15 because right here they start to put some pressure on him to change his story because of the Sabbath, **“So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, ‘He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see.’”** Notice the term “again.” Think long and hard about what you say next so you will not be guilty of breaking the Sabbath. I think this man must of known that this was enemy territory. He must of heard about the opposition of the Pharisees against Jesus, because there is no elongation of this whole healing. You can imagine how he must have gone through every detail with family and friends. “I was just sitting there like any other day. I heard lost of commotion but didn’t know what was going on, and then suddenly this man talks to be ...” And he keeps going with the explanation. But here it is short and to the point, “He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see.” Short and to the point.

Now this would have been enough for the Pharisees who prided their righteousness before God by the keeping of the Sabbath above all. He had broken it on three levels according to their teaching and traditions. They were not permitted to make clay that was made for pottery and other vessels. Well Jesus made clay. You were not permitted to help someone who was injured and needed medical attention on the Sabbath unless it was life or death. If someone broke an arm, that arm could be set the next day. Another law was putting any sort of saliva or ointment on the eyes. And you can almost imagine that maybe this is the reason why Jesus uses the method that he uses to really challenge the religious leaders with their traditions that had arisen above the God’s holy Law itself. He wanted them to see the good and the mercy that

he had done on this blessed day of rest and refreshment that pointed to that ultimate rest that would come in his kingdom when there would be no blind or lame or any other disease, where the curse will finally and forever be lifted.

But look at the response of these men to how Jesus healed him, “Some of the Pharisees said, **‘This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.’ But others said, ‘How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?’ And there was a division among them.**” There was division. Some said that he was from God while others said that he was definitely not. And it is amazing how often we are coming to conclusions that we think are absolutely rational, and airtight, and there is no way that we could ever be wrong. And this is where we have to be so careful that we see things through the wisdom of God’s word. Because both sides think they are in the know and are logical. The first is, it doesn’t matter if this miracle is legitimate or not. It was done on the Sabbath. God commands no work. This is a work, so this man sinned and therefore - here is the conclusion- he cannot be from God. Others look at the miracle and realized that no one can open the eyes of the blind, especially a man who was born blind but God, therefore - here is the conclusion, he must be from God. I wonder if men like Nicodemus or Joseph of Arimathea are present in this group or not. And again, it was not wrong of the Pharisees to investigate the authenticity of the miracle itself. It is just that they did not go far enough. They will put this man on trial, and as we will see next week even his parents are fearful, and cast him out of the synagogue, but they will not investigate the message and credentials of Jesus Christ.

And the great danger of looking at their response is thinking that we are altogether different than them. Even those who love Christ and desire to follow him, we have pockets of Pharisaism in our lives. I can recall an individual who came to Christ, and then went out for fellowship with a so-called mature believer. And this person gave that babe in Christ a long set of rules for his life. Indicating everything from what kind of music, even what kind of genre of music he should listen to, what kind of restaurants, what kind of friends he needs to associate with. I remember talking to the young Christian later and indicating to him, that is not Christianity. Christianity is our freedom in Christ from the penalty of sin. We are no longer under the law, but also God has given us freedom to follow and obey him. There is a desire to live a transformed life. When we are fixated just on an external list of rules and regulations it is more about us and less about God and his glory. It is less about the other person and their spiritual welfare. Our lives will change and certainly there are do’s and don’t’s, but a list never saved anyone. I beg you, in the lives of one another - don’t be a Pharisee.

Look at verse 17, **“So they said again to the blind man, ‘What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?’ He said, ‘He is a prophet.’”** And this brings to an end the second verbal exchange with this man. The first being with the crowd. And it is sort of a peculiar text, because the vast majority of these Pharisees would hate Jesus, and yet they turn to this man for verification as far as the disagreement among them, for him to resolve the dispute. They ask him the question because of his intimate interaction with Jesus, “since he has opened your eyes.”

But I think a simpler explanation to this matter of why they ask him the question is that it is asked by the majority who think because in their mind Jesus is an imposter, and there has already been pressure put on this man, that he will give a response that

is favourable to them, and announce that Jesus is an imposter or fraud. Back in chapter 5 with the invalid, he seems to be more in line with the Pharisees than Jesus even though Jesus healed him.

But what we are given here is a short and very direct answer from the this man that was healed that takes in all that he knows of Christ which was very limited. And it is amazing to go through this chapter because his spiritual sight as far as who Jesus is becomes clearer and clearer. And it is only two words in the Greek, but he says very clearly, **“He is a prophet.”** Listen to what D.A. Carson says about this, **““The man’s eyes are opening wider: he is beginning to see still more clearly, while the eyes of his judges are becoming clouded over with blinding, theological mist.”** Here are men that should have seen the obvious - Jesus is the prophet of God. He is from God. We must listen to him. But they cannot see what is so obvious to this man. His knowledge is certainly incomplete but it is growing and he is responding positively to the more revelation that he receives or understands, and is even will to stand for Christ in hostile places.

But the thing that I want us to see in this passage is the response of the Pharisees because their response to this man who was born blind is two fold. One is that it lacks rejoicing. There is no mercy or pity shown to this man in his miserable condition. He was a beggar and that was the only option open in his life. And now he can see. This is not a time of interrogation or of anger or finger pointing but a time of rejoicing and celebrating with this man the goodness of God in his life. And again, in our hard-hearts we can miss so much that we can actually celebrate with other individuals. We have such a hard time rejoicing with those who rejoice. It is almost like for certain people we want the worst rather than God’s best. Learn to rejoice with others is actually a spiritual skill that God wants us to cultivate.

And the other thing that we see in the Pharisees is a lack of gratitude in God. They should have been overwhelmed that this man that could not even come into the Temple to worship God has been made whole by the power of God. This is none other than the power of God. And when we see the work of God in the lives of others, and it is there. It might be seem small but without God working in the human heart there is no change that will ever come. Our lives should be lived in constant gratitude, not just for his work in our lives but in our brothers and sisters in Christ. Are you known as a believers who rejoices? Are you known for a constant and thankful heart? Our Christianity should never produce Pharisees but worshipers that see God’s hand all around us and in the lives of others.