

Partial Knowledge John 9:18-23

We come to the third and more pressing dialogue after the healing of the man who was born blind. The first was by the neighbours and the man himself. Jesus has now departed and this man is left to testify what happened to him, and that he was healed by Jesus. Some recognized him but others thought it was only someone who looked like him. And you can imagine seeing this man sit at the gate and beg everyday and he can now see how it would be a struggle to comprehend such an amazing miracle. So they do not know what to do with him, so they bring him to the Pharisees and that is the second dialogue between this man and the Pharisees. And the Pharisees quickly conclude that this miracle cannot have come from the power of God or through the agency of God because it was done on the Sabbath. This is one of the extraordinary elements in the gospels is that the enemies of Jesus have to admit to these miracles, so the only option is to argue about its source. And here through their interpretation and through their scripture twisting about the Sabbath they conclude that Jesus cannot be from God. He is not the source.

But there is division among the Pharisees, so they ask the man who was born blind who he thought Jesus is, and he says a prophet, which makes him a problem because the Pharisees do not want the people to trust in Jesus. And for this man, because he has an open heart, the person of Jesus is coming clearer and clearer. But for the Pharisees it is the exactly opposite. Now tonight, we come to the third dialogue, and notice that there is a subtle shift in who is doing the investigating in verse 18, we have "the Jews" and not the Pharisees. And this included some of the Pharisees but this was the ruling body of the Jews, and they had power and authority - the Sanhedrin. And what verses 18 and following take on is more of a formal legal environment, to not only ascertain the person of Jesus and how this man was healed. But that is what it is in name - to find the truth. The problem is for the religious leaders is they think they know the truth, so they are really not looking for information but some way to validate their conclusions and also condemn Jesus and show him to be none other than a fraud. This man is becoming an obstacle.

And here is the problem with the religious leaders, and that is having partial knowledge but thinking that they have full knowledge. And the moment that anyone thinks that they have full knowledge and acts it usually does not turn out very well. And it is a real danger today. We have something called the internet. And it is amazing in our current political climate where conspiracy theories run so rampant on both the left and the right that so many people think that they are in the know, and everyone else is dumb, stupid, in the dark, and to be opposed, because they do not have the full knowledge that you do. And I cannot think of anything that has weakened the true church of Jesus Christ than partial knowledge. It takes our eyes off Jesus and his gospel. It takes things that are important but not of primary importance, and makes them primary. And takes what is primary importance - Jesus, his gospel and our testimony of that gospel - and makes it secondary at best. We are losing the gospel.

It is so easy to think that we have full knowledge, and be proud and arrogant, and even condemning of other. We forget we get our identity in Christ not in politics or anything else. This caused the Pharisees to write off people. It caused the Pharisees to

not rejoice but actually be angry that this man in this miserable condition of blindness was actually lifted out of that misery. We are left cold and heartless. None of us have full knowledge. There is only one that does. That is why when we come to his word we trust in his word and his word alone. We trust in what he says and what he commands, even if it doesn't make sense to us because we realize he is omniscient and we are not. Christianity produces humble servants. I wonder if any people look at us and how we respond to others if they see anything of the Pharisees or the religious leaders in us? I want us to see is two responses to the healing of this man tonight. Two groups that had knowledge and how they responded to this healing and then draw some conclusions.

1. We need to see partial knowledge of the Pharisees. Vv. 18-19.

It is amazing how often we think that we are right. Sometimes we act against others, or will say something against others or even accuse others of something, and we might even be right. But the attitude in which we said the things we said or the vengeance in our heart controls us rather than Christ. When we gave it to someone there was nothing of the fruit of the Spirit. Think of the last time you had an argument with someone. Galatians 5:22-23 says, **"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."** Was there any of those attributes present or did we just give them a piece of our mind - whether it was our spouse, colleague or child? You see we can many times see the error and sin of our way; we can see that we were wrong, but fail to change or even admit it. Welcome to the world of the religious leaders. They doubt the authenticity of this miracle but even when it is validated they will not change. They will not alter their opinion or bow the knee to Christ. How are we responding when we have a fuller knowledge about what is going on in our hearts and lives?

Look at verse 18, **"The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight."** Again, the Jews would be the ruling body, the Sanhedrin. And they didn't believe that Jesus is the Christ because he was not the Messiah that they wanted. And they had their doubts about that this man was really born blind. And they could argue with this man or even the people who saw this man by the gate begging day in and day out, but they decided to go to the source and that is his parents. His parents could easily corroborate the man's testimony because he is their child. And look at the phrase, "called his parents." You have to see the enormity of this situation. It would be almost like receiving a subpoena to appear in court. These religious leaders had that kind of power. There was no alternate - they had to come and appear. And you can imagine the joy in their hearts that their son can see, but now the dread because everyone knows about the hatred of the religious leaders toward Jesus.

And so they might have been accompanied by the temple guards to appear before all of these learned and powerful men. And they end up asking two questions in verse 19, **"and asked them, 'Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?'"** The first question would be easy to answer, and that is "Is this your son, who you say was born blind?" The way it is asked is that they knew what the the parents already professed, and that is that he was born blind, but there is

almost like a pressure that is being exerted on them to answer in a different way. If you are lying to us there will be severer repercussions. And the second question raised here by these men trained in theology ask an impossible question because a miracle occurred, and that is how did he receive his sight. And you can imagine the great pressure exerted on them to give some other explanation rather than Jesus, or to say that he was not born blind or they put some balm on his eyes or whatever. It would be so much easier on them. If you cannot discredit the man was born blind, find someone close to him that does not have a loyalty to Jesus that can.

But the part that I want us to see is right there in verse 18, **“The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight.”** That word “until” is so critical. The evidence is stacking up to be so overwhelming that Jesus is none other than the Christ and that this miracle occurred through his agency. The testimony of the parents corroborated what was already said by the blind man that can now see. That means that after talking to the parents they believed that this man was healed - an authentic miracle. They thought they knew everything, but their knowledge was partial and flawed, but instead of repenting, they kept up with their interrogation and would not bow the knee to Jesus. And here is the question: why did they stubbornly continue in unbelief? Why not just profess the obvious and if they have been wrong here maybe they have been wrong in other places? It seems that would be a normal and rational way to handle this situation. This is why: Jesus is not the Saviour or Lord or Messiah that they want. And therefore they will stand opposed to him.

And there are a couple of lessons that we can glean from this. One is that we can be so enthusiastic about giving truth to others, and think beyond a shadow of a doubt that if I can answer every question, and if I can show the logic and the beauty and necessity of the gospel people will come. But this is where our reliance can never be on ourselves. None of us have the power to open a blind and cold and callous and dead heart. Only God can. Our confidence is that he can use our feeble words. That is why so many give up is because they have tried to witness and testified to others but their confidence was in self, and when the results didn't come they just stopped. Our joy and confidence is in what God can do. That is why we testify and witness.

The other thing is to see if we are like the Pharisees in this aspect. We might have thought we were treating our spouse right or training our children right, or being a faithful member in our churches, but suddenly the word brings light and we see our sin. And that is what the word of God does. But let me ask you honestly: are you making the necessary changes in your life as they are exposed? Or is it just business as usual? It is amazing how we can see sin, feel even a level of remorse, and then make some excuse. Tomorrow I will change, but one day leads to another. Light was given to the Pharisees, yet no change took place. Don't be like the Pharisees. If we do not change or we are not changing then we are placing our wisdom and ways above God. It is now time to bow the knee to him. Just like this miracle is truth whatever God has shown you in his word is truth - don't continue in unbelief.

2. We see the partial knowledge of his parents. Vv. 20-23.

I love the Scriptures because I recognize the people in the Bible. They are people that we see all the time. And here we see that there is a caution among these

parents to identify with Jesus because of the cost. And that is the thing about the Christian life and our Christian existence is that there is a cost and there is suffering that will be related to our faith and trust in Jesus. We have so misunderstood our Christian lives and how God works in us and through us. We think if we are faithful enough, dedicated enough, pray enough that God will give us a life of very little adversity or suffering for the name of Christ. We will suffer, like all people because we live in this fallen world. There will be illnesses, and conflict and death, but we will also suffer because we are believers in Christ. Listen to this promise in 2 Timothy 3:12, **“Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”** Then listen to what the apostle says that are two realities that have been granted by God for our good in Philippians 1:29, **“For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.”** It has been granted by God, through his sovereign power and control to not only believe (he opens our hearts so that we call on Christ), but also suffer for his sake. In other words because we are believers and profess Jesus. It is one of the clearest marks that we are believers is that we suffer for his sake. And that fear of suffering many times controls our hearts, that it is easy to either say nothing or downplay the truth about Jesus. And this is what you see with the parents in their response. There is truth but there is also the shading of the truth to protect self not to be aligned with Jesus.

Look at verse 20, **“His parents answered, ‘We know that this is our son and that he was born blind.’** These are amazing words. They admit that this is their son, and that he had been born blind, which means he has never seen his parents face, and you can imagine the excitement of the parents as they beheld their son and he beheld them. Someone has once said that, “seeing is believing.” I mean to give sight to someone who is blind that you dearly love must convince you that Jesus is the Christ. You would think that you would be willing to die for that person.

This is why it is so surprising what we read next, **“But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.”** It is an amazing answer. They certainly were not present when their son was healed. But they knew it was Jesus. Notice they know that it was a person that healed him. It was not some sort of medicine or direct intervention from God apart from anyone else. They say, **“nor do we know who opened his eyes.”** They know someone did, but they are not willing to suffer for their son. It is willful unbelief in Jesus. People often think that if they could only go back to the first century and see the miracles of Jesus first hand then they would believe. We really do not know the power of unbelief. Not even his parents would put their trust in Jesus. But it is also amazing to consider how great the power of God is to grant individuals belief in Christ and overcome their stubborn hearts.

And John fills in the blank as far as why we have this response from his parents in verse 22, **“(His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.)”** Notice the brackets around these words. They are just an explanation around these words. Now there is a great debate among scholars whether this is some invention of the apostle John or whether it happened to be added later because excommunication did not exist in the first century. It did not

exist until a much later date. But excommunication, at least in some form existed as far back as Ezra 10:7-8, **“And a proclamation was made throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the returned exiles that they should assemble at Jerusalem, and that if anyone did not come within three days, by order of the officials and the elders all his property should be forfeited, and he himself banned from the congregation of the exiles.”** And what they would do would be ban anyone guilty of blasphemy but also anyone who was closely aligned to the person who was guilty from the community so that their sin would not spread. And that is exactly what you see in our text. Jesus in the mind of the religious leaders was an imposter. He was not the Christ, so any that confessed that he was - was to be put out.

And none of us know how great a threat that was in that society because they lived in a theocracy. All of life was governed by God in the community. You might have problems with employment or buying and selling your goods. Others would not want to associate with you for fear of the same sentence being handed down to them. The parents knew of the religious leaders hatred of Jesus. That was public fact and not something hidden. They knew of their power. And realizing this causes us to understand somewhat their hesitancy to give Jesus the credit for this healing. But it is also irrational. I mean think of it: how great is the power of the religious leaders, and how great must the power of Jesus be to heal their son? Who is to be more feared in life and death - God or man?

And let me end with a couple challenges. The first is that this fear of others has kept so many out of the kingdom. They know at least on one level that Jesus is the Christ the Saviour of the world, but never put their faith and trust in Christ because of fear of what others will say or treat them or whether they will want anything ever to do with them again. What will my family think if I trust in Christ? How will this change my marriage? Will my friends have anything to do with me at school anymore if I confess that Jesus is the Christ and start to follow Him? Imagine knowing that Jesus is Lord and Saviour but fearing people so much that you are kept out of the kingdom of Christ. Listen to what Jesus says in Matthew 10:28, **“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”** Who do you ultimately fear. Your fear will look so foolish in the day of judgment especially when such grace and mercy has been extended to you.

The other challenge is for us as believers. We many times speak when we should be silent. And that is a big problem. But one of the reasons why we do not suffer in this life is not our godliness but because of our silence. We are more interested in self-preservation so we keep silent. We are ruled and controlled by what people think or treat us rather than the God of eternity. Again, people can be so big and God at times in our lives can be so small. This is the same God who opened our eyes and changed our hearts. No one else could do it but he did it so much so that we have believed on Jesus. And therefore he can open the blind eyes and hearts of others. One of the true signs of a believer is that we confess him. Right after Jesus says to fear God and not man he says in Matthew 10:31-33, **“Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.”** A sign that we are

believers is that we confess Jesus. Let us preach the message of our big and caring God and be the shining lights of Christ. Let us be like the blind man who had received sight and not like his parents. Let's give not a partial testimony but the full testimony that Jesus truly is our Lord and Saviour.