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THE LOOKOUT

FEBRUARY 2024

Unit: Gospel of John (Part 3)

Theme: Believe

Overview: *Belief* has more than one nuance. It can refer to everything from believing it will rain, to believing the Cubs will win another World Series, to believing in God. If God does the providing for salvation, then people do the partaking of salvation. They do this by believing. *Belief* looms large in John's Gospel. The verb *believe* occurs scores of times in this Gospel, and it never appears as a noun because, for John, *belief* is something one does. In this third month of the study of John's Gospel, students will learn of the belief of the disciples, the lack of belief of the Pharisees, and how *signs* (miracles) and *sight* interface with *belief*.

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.

Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.

Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF FEBRUARY 18, 2024

**LESSON AIM: Beware of spiritual blindness
which comes between people
and the truth of God.**

UNIT: Gospel of John (Part 3)

THEME: Believe

LESSON TEXT: John 9:1-7, 13-16, 24-38

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: John 5:16, 31-47; 7:1-4, 37-52; 9:8-12, 17-23,
39-41; 12:17-19; 1 Corinthians 1:18-19

THE UNBELIEF OF THE PHARISEES

BY MARK SCOTT

The secular proverb, “There are none so blind as those who will not see,” is certainly true. That proverb would describe many of the Pharisees of Jesus’ day. These were the “separated ones.” They separated themselves from the things of the world so that they would be pure before God. But a host of them allowed their pride to separate them from God and the people they were supposed to lead. Their righteousness had become “extreme” (see Tom Hovestol’s book by Moody Press, *Extreme Righteousness: Seeing Ourselves in the Pharisees*).

In this Festival Section of John’s Gospel (chapters 5-12) the Pharisees are viewed as the primary enemies of Jesus. They wanted to kill him (5:18; 7:1). They questioned his education (7:15). They charged him with having a demon and being a Samaritan (7:20; 8:48, 52). They wanted to arrest him (7:32, 44; 11:57). They charged him with lawbreaking (9:16). They wanted to stone him (8:59; 10:31). They set Jesus up and ended up slitting their own throats. In the chapter that recounted the healing of the blind man from birth, they asked Jesus if they were also blind (9:40). Jesus answered that there was more than one type of blindness.

The Blind See

John 9:1-7

Sometime between the Feast of Tabernacles in the fall (7:10) and the Feast of Dedication in the winter (10:22), Jesus and his disciples came across a *man blind from birth*. The disciples seemed content to discuss theological reasons for the man’s blindness (i.e., sin). Jesus responded that neither the man nor his parents were to blame. Like everyone else, the man was born into a world where sin and death reigned. Due to malnutrition in the ancient Near East, blindness was fairly common. This miracle must have happened near the old city of Jerusalem in light of where the Pool of Siloam was.

Jesus said that his blindness was so that the *works* (i.e., one of the biblical vocabulary words for miracles) of God *might be displayed in him*. In verses 4-5 Jesus taught about his mission and his identity. Work for God must be done with urgency because *night is coming* (an eschatological metaphor), *when no one can work*. Since Jesus is the light of the world (cf. 8:12), he can make people see—which is what he does next.

With his spittle and dirt Jesus made a mud pie and applied it to the man’s eyes. There was some thought in the

ancient world that saliva had medicinal qualities. Jesus commanded the man to go wash the mud off in the *Pool of Siloam*. Imagine him bumping into people along the way. The “sign” is told with three verbs—he went, he washed, and he saw (v. 7).

The Blind Remain Blind

John 9:13-16, 24-34

Jesus evidently disappeared from the crowd (John 9:12). The former blind man was left to go it alone. The neighbors were the first to work him over (vv. 8-12). His brightened face must have made him look very different as they did not recognize him. Those well-intentioned dragons took the former blind man to the Pharisees. They proceeded to conduct a hearing (kangaroo court) and took their turn working him over. They could not deny the miracle, so they discredited Jesus by making him out to be a Sabbath breaker. The Pharisees brought the man’s parents in and worked them over, too (vv. 18-23).

The man was brought in for a second hearing. Every effort they made to discredit Jesus was countered by the former blind man. They called Jesus a *sinner*. The man gave his undeniable testimony. He was blind, but now he saw (v. 25). The authorities asked the former blind man to rehearse the details of his miracle again. By this point the former blind man might have been losing his patience. His logic was impeccable. “Want to be his disciples?” “We are disciples of Moses and do not know where Jesus came from.” “But he opened my eyes, and how does a sinner do that?” They replied, “*You were steeped in sin at birth*.” Even the people who witnessed Jesus’ miracles firsthand did not always believe.

The Former Blind Believe

John 9:35-38

To be thrown out of the synagogue was no small thing. It had religious, cultural, and familial ramifications. But Jesus *found him*. This is the first time the man actually saw Jesus. Even though Jesus blessed the man for believing in him without having seen him (John 20:29; cf. 1 Peter 1:8), this was a revelation with eyes wide open. The man believed and *worshiped* Jesus. Restored sight is glorious.

Spiritual blindness is terrible. Pray with Paul that the eyes of our heart will be enlightened (Ephesians 1:18). ■

APPLICATION

BLIND SPOTS

BY DAVID FAUST

How could they miss it? How could the Pharisees interact so closely with Jesus but fail to recognize him as God's Son?

His miracles weren't done in a corner. Delighted wedding guests surely spread the word about how he changed water into wine. A man who couldn't walk for 38 years couldn't keep it a secret after Jesus healed his legs. Thousands with stomachs full of fish and bread must have told the news about Jesus multiplying a boy's small lunch.

The Blindness of Unbelief

But not everyone was pleased. When Jesus healed a man who had been born blind, his adversaries objected. In their opinion, by making mud and smearing it on the man's eyes, Jesus violated their rules against working on the Sabbath. The Pharisees interrogated FBM (the Formerly Blind Man), and the conversation went something like this:

Pharisees: "How was your eyesight restored?"

FBM: "A man put mud on my eyes."

Pharisees: "What is your opinion of him?"

FBM: "He must be a messenger of God."

Next, they questioned FBM's parents to make sure it wasn't a case of mistaken identity.

Pharisees: "Is this man your son? Was he really born blind?"

FBM's nervous mom and dad: "Yes, and yes."

Pharisees: "Then why can he see now?"

FBM's parents: "We don't know, but leave us out of this. Our son can speak for himself. Ask him!"

So, then it was time for a follow-up interview with the Formerly Blind Man.

Pharisees: "The man who restored your sight—we think he's bad."

FBM: "That's strange. Seeing is good! I once was blind, but now I see!"

Pharisees: "How exactly did he heal you?"

FBM: "I already explained that. Why are you so curious? Do you want to follow Jesus yourselves?"

Pharisees: "No! We are disciples of Moses."

FBM: "Maybe so, but you must be blind if you can't see God's power enabled him to heal my eyes."

Pharisees: "Get out of here! We don't need lectures from sinners like you."

Sadly, "Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him" (John 12:37).

Are Our Eyes Open?

How could the Pharisees have such close proximity to Jesus, but reject him? Ironically, God's Living Word "was in the world . . . [but] the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him" (John 1:10-11).

Before we pharisaically congratulate ourselves for being better than the Pharisees, we should ask, *Do we always recognize God's work? Do we consistently see his hand in nature and hear his voice in Scripture? At times, are we blind to our own faults? Do we overlook the needs of our neighbors? Do we ever try to find our own way through the darkness without walking in the light of God's truth?*

Jesus searched for the man whose eyes he had healed (John 9:35-38), and when he found him, the Lord made sure his spiritual eyes were open, too.

Jesus: "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" FBM: "Who is he, sir?"

Jesus: "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." FBM: "Lord, I believe."

May our eyes always be open to see God at work. And may our confession always be, "Lord, I believe."

Personal Challenge: Do you have some spiritual blind spots of your own? Join with the psalmists and pray, "Forgive my hidden faults" (Psalm 19:12) and "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law" (Psalm 119:18). ■

DISCOVERY

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Name a time when you blamed yourself for something you later discovered wasn't your fault. How did you feel about your discovery?

Ask two people to read aloud **John 9:1-7, 13-16, 24-38**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

2. Why did Jesus' disciples assume the man's blindness resulted from his sin or his parents' sin?
3. What might the act of Jesus making mud with his saliva and applying it to the blind man's eyes signify?
4. Why is obedience important in the story of the blind man's healing and what does this tell us about our own need for obedience?
5. How does the story emphasize the importance of doing God's work while it is still day?
6. How did the man born blind demonstrate faith in Jesus in the face of opposition and pressure from the religious leaders? How can we demonstrate faith today amid opposition?
7. When encouraged to speak critically about Jesus and the miracle he performed, the man who had been blind responded, "One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" What does this teach us about combining personal experience with faith in Jesus?
8. The man Jesus healed was barred from the synagogue because he refused to condemn Jesus. What does this teach us about the potential cost of faith and obedience to Christ?
9. What does this account teach us about Jesus' willingness to expose and heal spiritual blindness?
10. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **John 20:19-31**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■