

“Seeing”
Pastor John Bronson

John 9:1-41

June 17, 2012

Message for 6/17/12, Father’s Day; text, John 9:1-41, title, “Seeing”

Ministry Moment: Missions
Call to Worship: Psalm 50:1-15 and Prayer

Worship Theme: Truth can only be known through Jesus Christ

Sunday Evening in the Word
5:30 – 7:00 pm in the Music Building
Evening service will be cancelled to allow families to celebrate their dads!

Musical Call to Worship: “A Call to Praise”

Pre Service Song: “This Is My Father’s World”
Song # 143

Welcome and Announcements

Ministry Moment: Missions, Dennis Hurt

Call to Worship and Prayer Psalm 50:1-15

Preparing the Heart in Song:
“Great is Thy Faithfulness” Song # 139
“How Deep the Father’s Love For Us” overhead

Offering and Offertory

Special Music: “When Daddy Says I’m Beautiful”
Valerie, Emily, Amanda & Jessica Cagnacci
with Kari Walden piano accompaniment

Message: “Seeing” John 9:1-41
Pastor John Bronson

Song of Gladness for God’s Grace:
“For the Beauty of the Earth” Song # 793

Parting Word of Grace and Invitation to Prayer

Sunday Evening Studies:
Cancelled to allow families to celebrate their Dads!

“The Prayer Closet”

June 17, 2012

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”
(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying that:

Steve and Carol Lyons in Tanzania: the Spirit will stir up a new joy in serving in the whole Christian team; the Lord will extend His protecting and providing hand over all aspects of their work; that the Father will draw many to faith, especially from amongst the Muslims.

President Obama: the Lord will provide for his and his family’s safety; that he will be prompted by the Spirit to turn from the foolish and to the wise; that all ideological prejudices will be taken away from his understanding

Children’s Ministry and VBS: that both the Sunday teaching staff and the many volunteers needed for a great VBS week will be in place in time; that both will witness significant growth through outreach into the community; that all will seek the Lord’s favor and the Spirit’s power

Military or Public Service Personnel of the Week: Lt. Al Billington of Paradise Police Department (wife; Debbie): please pray for the Lord to find solutions to the diminishing budgets and the lack of man power for the department

Young Adult of the Week: Samantha Ryan at Butte College (daughter of John and Michelle): for safety during her commute to and from school, that she get the classes she needs for the Fall.

Please pray for the health and recovery of our church family: Carol Bernerd, Harley Chapman Sr., Nathan Giordano, Diane Kinnamont, Carol Koehler, Mike Kokoletsos, Volker Ladendorf, Roseanne Lane, Dick & Jane Miller, John Montgomery, Fred & Jean Pauly, Phil Peterson, Jean Price, Cindy Rodney, John Stancik, Wally Yates
(please call the office to request updates to this list)

We are looking at John chapter 9. We are going to cover the entire chapter today, so I hope you are ready for an early supper. It is a narrative section and we are not going to do all of that. I want to begin by reading the beginning and the end of the chapter: 9:1-2 and then 39-41. Many of you will recognize this episode in the life of Jesus. *“As he passed by, [Jesus] saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ Jesus answered, ‘It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.’* That statement is thematic for the opening section of the chapter, but notice where we are when we come to the end of the chapter. Now Jesus is speaking to a mixed multitude including scribes and Pharisees. *“Jesus said, ‘For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind. Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, ‘Are we also blind?’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.’* If you are a student of the Word, you have got to be able to move from the opening section of this chapter which reveals God in His gracious goodness and deliberately sets aside the question of judgment, and come all the way down to the end of the chapter where Jesus says, *“It is for judgment that I came.”* That is what the task is as we wait upon the Spirit of God to give us understanding as we seek to receive from John, the gospel writer, what he is always desiring that we would receive. It is the constant intent of John to open our eyes and our minds to the reality of the fact that Jesus is the Messiah sent from God. That means we have to understand who the Messiah is that was sent to us. We have a tendency, of course, to “repackage” Jesus all the time, and to fit Him into our specific set of preconceptions. A careful reading of the Word of God will consistently break apart those preconceptions and force us to deal with the true God and His Son, which is indeed the intent of Jesus: to reveal to us who the true God is.

In the opening paragraph, verses 1-3, Jesus sees and He responds to a burdensome need. This is classic with Jesus. We know that earlier in the Gospel He was walking by the Pool of Bethesda when He saw a man who was lying beside the pool and he was lame and in His compassions Jesus attended to the need. That is what we see here too. He gives this man sight. The man, you must realize, has no claim on Jesus at all. It is essential for us to appreciate what that means. Jesus sees a man and He sees a man in need, and He responds to that need. But it is not that Jesus is obligated. Need places no obligation on God. Jesus does not heal this man out of a sense of obligation: *“I can do it, therefore I must.”* It is an act of compassion.

This is what is called grace. Dennis Hurt made an appeal. He said there is a need. That need is in Tanzania. The Deacons have let us know that there is a need. That need happens to be within the context of our own congregation. Anyone of you might be sitting here with two wonderful resources: you may have an empty calendar and you may have a full bank account. But let me stress to any and all of you, the fact that you have been made aware of a need and you have the ability to respond places no obligation on you at all, because we are called to be like Jesus and to give graciously. We are to respond like Jesus, and to give without judgment, with the desire only to make the graces and the goodness of God known, and to let the love of God pour through us and into the life of the one who is in need. That is what we are called to do. So if you are presently arguing with the Holy Spirit, saying ‘Don’t bug me!’ just remember what the conversation is really about. It is not about any obligation that has been leveled on you; it is about an opportunity to be like Christ, and thereby to display the goodness and gain glory for our Father.

This is an aspect of grace which troubles us when we deal with God. What it means is when God acts in grace we have no way of controlling Him. He acts freely out of the resources of His own heart and mind. That is the nature of grace. So the conversation and the decision making is fundamentally internal, and for us as we stand before God and we realize that we are those who have received and now have the opportunity to give.

Now the disciples are having a hard time with the whole episode. Go down to verse 2 and notice how the disciples respond to the man in need. They don’t feel any obligation to heal him; what they want to know is where did the

problems arise? “*Who sinned, this man or his parents?*” I suspect that if you work at the Hope Center, or sometimes if you work in the Crisis Pregnancy Center or at the Rescue Mission you may have that question in your mind. Perhaps sometimes when our deacons deal with people and they ask the question in their minds, “How did you get into such a mess?” How does Jesus respond? The disciples want to locate the moral cause for the man’s blindness. There is an assumption of sorts behind this desire. The assumption is that we live in a moral universe. As moral creatures we almost instinctively desire that there be at least a rough proportion between a person’s moral character and their experience and circumstances in life. We want that. What would be good, if the world was as it should be is that you would have good things for good people and, you know, other stuff for the bad guys! This impulse is within us in spite of all the evidence against it. We know that the world is not fair. We know that every person who suffers has not necessarily done something specific to bring about that problem. We know that. But we wish that the world was just, and may I say that God does too.

When you read scripture you cannot go far and not recognize that justice and righteousness are part of the core of God’s being. So we cannot, in light of Jesus’s comments, we cannot come to the conclusion, “O well, God is all about compassion and we can just forget about justice and righteousness.” You can’t do that for that is a denial of the character of God, and that is a dangerous place for anyone to be.

The importance of this aspect, the importance of recognizing that our God is a God of justice and righteousness, but He is also a God of compassion is brought to our attention perhaps most clearly in Genesis 18:35. You may or may not recognize that location, but this is when Abraham has been talking to God about the [impending] judgment that God is going to bring on two exceedingly wicked cities, Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham knows that his nephew Lot is in the city and he is very anxious for Lot. So he has approached God and he is asking God, “Are you just going to wipe out all of the good people with the bad?” It is supposed to be good for good and bad for bad. So what if there is a “good” in there? So he starts out at fifty and he finally wheedles God down to ten. But the principle that needs to grab our attention is here in verse 35 of Genesis 18. This is what Abraham says and it is exceedingly important. “*Far be it from you, God, to do such a thing, to treat the good and the wicked in the same way, to put the righteous to death with the wicked so that the righteous fare as the wicked. Far be that from You. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?*” It is a rhetorical question that Abraham lifts up to the Father. The answer is obvious. Of course He should do what is just. The whole notion of a judge, which in the Old Testament meant to rule, to order the life of the community, the whole idea was that it would be done in such a way that justice and righteousness would be upheld. Instead, when justice and righteousness are not upheld, then what you and I are reduced to is currying the favor of the powerful. For if there is no justice, if there is no rule of law, then it is the rule of force, and you can only secure your well-being by getting close to the most powerful people you can think of. Some people think that is the way you should treat God. Abraham did not think that. He said that God is to be trusted because He is just.

For most people this is not only disheartening, this need to draw close to the people of power, it is also degrading. The originating impulse or desire for the rule of law was the longing for a social and political order that does not operate according to the arbitrary will of the powerful. Do you understand what I am talking about? I am talking about having clarity as to what the rules and regulations and expectations are, so that each person knows what is expected of them, they know how to operate within certain circumstances and situations. Recently I have heard with great clarity that one of the problems that our nation is having at this very time is that the business community does not know what the government is going to do next. Consequently they do not know or have confidence they can invest their money in projects with the expectation of a fair return. You do not want to live in a society which is under the control, the arbitrary control of people of power. You want to live in a society that is governed by the rule of law. Justice is a publically accessible standard of right and wrong, for comprehension is part of what is meant by saying that something is just. By the way, fathers, this has to do directly and immediately with how you raise your families. The authority of a father in his home should never be an arbitrary authority. It is not given to us

by God to simply walk into the midst of our family and issue edicts and expect that they will be honored because you are the “big guy”. We are to be like God in this matter. We are in fact to lay out in front of our children and our spouse clear standards and expectations so that they are comfortable and have an understanding of what they are supposed to do and what they are not supposed to do so they can enter into and walk with us and flourish so that they are growing as they are increasingly self-guiding and responsible young people. But if dads walk into the midst of their situation and arbitrarily change the rules then everybody is left in confusion, uncertainty and fear. It is not a small matter that our current President has issued more executive decrees than any other president of the United States, that he has chosen to deliberately not enforce portions of the law that he in his own opinion does not consider to be worthy of enforcement. You and I should be outraged that we have presently in the United States a president who has abandoned the rule of law. It has nothing to do with him being a democrat or a republican. It has everything to do with respect for the law, because without that respect, we are done.

However, God knows, Jesus knows and you and I know that in a world of sinners the possibilities for true justice are very slight. And because of our incapacities, compassion must come before judgment. So as we encounter the people around us as Jesus encounter this blind man, Jesus’ comments to His disciples should come forcibly to our minds and hearts. Jesus answered in verse 3, “It was not that this man sinned or his parents.” Now I want you to understand, looking at those words, Jesus does not say these people did not sin. They did, because all of us sin. But what He is saying here is that it is not the fact of their having sinned that is at issue. Rather their need is an opportunity to display or do the works of God. We have in our midst a woman who is actively involved in Safe Families. But wouldn’t it be a horrible thing if they were to phone her up and somebody says, “We want you to take care of our three precious children,” and she would say, “Well, who sinned in this situation?” Grace abounding! We don’t do that. You respond with compassion. That is what Jesus is saying here. Undoubtedly three children: anybody younger than seventeen is a mess! OK, that is why we got rid of all of ours. They are up and out! Somebody said to me, “O you must be suffering because of your empty nest.” No, were not suffering, no, no! It is good for [our son] Caleb is back so we don’t have to worry about that. But you understand that, right, that you respond with compassion to the need without needing to research the moral cause. That is what Jesus wants us to understand.

There is hope always that under the impact of compassion there may be healing in the lives of those we help. I am sure that any time you deal with people in need you are going to be exposed to realities and hopefully by being the presence of God in their lives you might in fact see truth with grace accomplish some wonderful changes. But Jesus’ words tell us the compassionate act displays the work of God even if no renewal comes, for He makes no reference here in the blind man’s situation to a change. We know the guy later changes, but Jesus makes no reference to that in His conversation with the disciples, nothing about “The man will change...” It was just, “he’s blind, let’s help him out.’ That is what Jesus does.

We are left with the realization that the proximate, not perfect but proximate, justice of human judgment and institutions are not likely to lead to relational healing or spiritual renewal. This, by the way, that statement is an explanation why divorce courts are a disaster. They don’t heal; they can’t. We cannot rely on a system of justice to exercise the compassions of God. It is the compassions of God that are needed.

Now we come to verses 3-5. Jesus says, *“We must work the works of Him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”* In those little verses Jesus makes two intriguing comments. First He says the present day in which we can do the works of God will be followed by a night in which no work can be done. So you should have a question in your mind, “when is that going to happen? What is He talking about?” The second thing that Jesus says in there is as long as He is in the world, He is the light of the world. So presumably this means that as long as Jesus is in the world, it is day! Therefore as long as Jesus is in the world, it is the time for us to engage in the works of God. That is what this is

about. The works of God in this case, when you read the context you realize that the works of God don't refer to everything God does. God does all kinds of things. But specifically the works of God are the works of compassion: that is what He is talking about. This is in line with the Father's self-description given to Moses. It is a wonderful description that I hope we would all memorize at some time. You find it at Exodus 34:6-7. This is how God describes Himself, and therefore it is describing how we want to be: that would be the application. *“The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin...”* There is another half to that statement which I am not going to read at the moment. This is the first half. We need to take that in and ask God to print that on our hearts. All that is done as Christian compassion is a display of the works of God. I fear that our appreciation and realization of this has faded in the last hundred or so years. There was a day when compassion, Christian compassion or charity was one of the most powerful forces in American society. I do not know if you realize it or not – the way they teach history now you don't learn anything and you don't understand what the character of our nation was in the earlier day. It was never perfect of course, but there was a time when volunteer societies, which were about 90% Christian, volunteer societies carried out more social services in our country than the combined efforts of every level of government. I think most of us are aware of the fact that the origin of hospitals and orphanages, of schools and clinics, and a whole variety of other things almost without exception they began as expressions of the compassion of God addressing the need of people for those kinds of services. Christian missions around the world continue to provide all kinds of goods and services to those mired in poverty, cut off from the economic life of their communities by prejudice and unjust laws and systems of privilege. Unhappily in some sectors of the evangelical communities of faith a kind of either-or attitude has come up as if we either seek to save people's souls or you save bodies, but you never do the two. I would hope that our recognition of Jesus' continual action in exercising His powers in compassionate healing for those who were in need without respect to whether or not those He helped would become His devoted followers would help to correct our minds and help us to understand the centrality of compassion and charity as the expressions of our being like Christ.

In reference to Jesus' comment about the day and night, we know that Jesus physically would soon be leaving. We realize this; we know the gospel, we know that Jesus is going to be crucified. Then shortly after that Jesus will, after the resurrection, ascend to heaven and is gone. But that does not mean that Jesus is gone. Luke begins the book we call Acts in this way (Acts 1:1): *“In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus [now here is the essential word] began...”* What Luke has done in this statement is he has said there are at least two portions to the work of Jesus. There is that which He began which leads all the way up to His death and resurrection and ascension, and then there is the work that He will accomplish through us in this age. Luke along with all the apostles and the church in general understood that the Spirit of Jesus is the animating power and directing mind of the church. Jesus will continue in the world until the end of this age. Here we see the significance of what Jesus says in Matthew 5:14-16. He says to the disciples, he says to the people waiting on Him, “You are the light of the world.” You have to know that He uses the exactly the same terminology as when He said, “I am the light of the world.” He is simply saying you and I are with Him, identical in our calling and in our reliance upon the Holy Spirit. The works that we are called to do are to give glory to the Father, because they are the very works the Father does. Paul made the same point in Ephesians 2:10 after describing that we are saved by faith through grace he says we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. So we have then a graphic sense of the centrality of these works of compassion.

Read with me verses 6-12. Now we will move through larger portions of the narrative. *“Having said these things, [Jesus] spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud and said to him, ‘Go wash in the pool of Siloam’ (which means Sent).”* He goes on a little further and you can read that. What Jesus has to say here – these verses put some very startling things in front of us. The people of the street, the people who lived around that portion of the city of Jerusalem can't believe what has happened. You have to understand that this guy has been blind since he was born and suddenly he can see. That just never happens! While

it is true that there are credulous people in the world who are ready to believe anything – you all know this; there are people to whom you can say, “I can turn this into a book of gold” and they will say, “Gee, can I have one?” But we should never assume that the people in Jerusalem in Jesus’ day were any more credulous than you and I are, and they know the difference between the normal and the miraculous. So, looking at this man that has been blind since birth and seeing that he has the ability to see, they are saying, “What is this?” They are amazed and rightly they should be. They are also at sixes and sevens over it. As with any miracle some people say, “There’s a trick!” How many of you are like that? How many of you are cynics? I know you are, I know you too well. If I came in here and I said I had just turned a tree in my garden that had oranges and all the oranges were solid gold, how many of you would believe me? Then I will offer my property for sale. No, no, no, we don’t buy that stuff. If you read verses 9-10 you realize they are in this kind of conversation. Some believe and some don’t; they are all in a tizzy over this. The man who was healed knows. He has got it straight. “I was blind, now I see.” He has got that straight.

To resolve the matter, they, the people of the street, bring the guy to the Pharisees. What needs to be resolved? Well, everybody wants to know what happened. They want to know if they are being deceived or not. They want to know was this done by God, or something else. They of course believed in demons. So they are not of a mind that the only power that is around is necessarily God. In our enlightened age we have decided that demons don’t exist. We also reject the idea of spiritual powers and principalities. In the ancient world they hadn’t done that. I would say that they probably believed too much and we probably believe too little. If you become seriously engaged in dealing with people at some point you are going to say to yourself, “There is something uncanny at work here. This person’s behavior is not just difficult, there is something else present.”

You have to understand as you read the narrative that the question they are asking is not what you and I would consider a scientific or even properly speaking a medical question. That is not the question they are asking. What they are asking is a spiritual question and that spiritual question will have great moral ramifications. They want to know what kind of power, good or evil, is at work here. This is why the fact that Jesus performed this healing on the Sabbath is important to them. It is also important to Jesus. It is not just a happenstance; you need to get it clear in your minds that Jesus did what He did on purpose every time He did it. He did it on the Sabbath, he performed a whole bunch of His miracles on a Sabbath, for a reason, to make a point. This was His point: the Sabbath is not about keeping rules.

Knowing that we are all 21st century Americans, what immediately comes up in your miserable depraved hearts is “Ah ha! No rules! We can all go to Outback [Steak House] and have steak!” Wrong! It is important to recognize that the point that Jesus is making is that the Sabbath is not about keeping rules; it is about worshiping God. It is about the refreshment that comes from letting our minds focus and our hearts be occupied with worshiping God, meditating on the Word, free from the distractions of normal daily life. The anticipation is that this in turn would help to equip a person to do the works of God. We hear something of the flavor of this – you might want to turn to this passage, I Thessalonians 4:9-12, a wonderful passage about practical life as Christians. This is what Paul writes to those Christians. Remember that they are very poor; the Thessalonian church was exceedingly poor. *“Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may live properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.”* Then in Ephesians 4:28 Paul adds this; this is a very critical addition: *“Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.”* Now you have a scriptural commendation for hard work, honest work, frugal living and the increase of your personal bank account of more than you need to meet your own needs. Why? To give [to those in need]! That is what he is saying.

Both Old and New Testaments place great value on honest work and productive lives, for every person is to aspire to be self-supporting and beyond that to be able to respond to the needs of others, that is, to be compassionate. Paul writes this to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16-17. You all know this: the word of God is inspired. AWANA knows this. If I could get all the AWANA people to stand up they could recite this backwards! But it is important for us to understand how it fits into the larger picture of Christian life. *“All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness...”* Then he completes the thought, and you don’t ever want to stop until you get to the end of this whole statement: *“...that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”* This should help us to bring some things into focus. Prayer, meditation, worship on Sunday has as one of its great purposes the strength, wisdom, courage and humility in God’s people to pursue good works for the rest of the week. Beloved, there is a wonderful parallel here. I hope you grasp this. Why are we asked to tithe? God doesn’t need a penny of what we have got. That is the point of reading Psalm 50: God doesn’t need anything, so why are we asked to tithe? I will tell you why. When you have established the personal discipline to take your available resources and chop out a tenth of them and give them away, you are a hundred times more able to give away some more, because you have just established your personal control over your money so your money doesn’t control you. The vast majority of Americans are controlled by their money. If you want proof, look at the debt ratio. So when we establish sufficient control to say, “Now I’ve got this much money; I am going to put this much aside, I am going to give this much to this purpose over here, and I am going to tend to my needs. And, O, I have too many needs. I am going to cut down my needs so I can continue to respond to the needs of others.” May I point out that exactly the same principle is true with time? When we learn to take control of our time by setting aside the Sabbath – oh, this guy has got to come from the sixteenth century! Amen, brothers and sisters, I come right straight out of the 16th century; in fact I come right straight out of the first century! – Most of us don’t have any time, nor do we have a Sabbath. We do not know how to rest. We do not know how to draw strength from God. We do not know how to take our calendars, set up its priorities, put God in the center and build a life that makes sense in terms of our discipleship under Jesus Christ. So we are in the sad condition of so many of our neighbors; neither our time nor our money is under our control.

Verses 13-17 the Pharisees divide between those fixed on the question of what can and cannot be done on the Sabbath – rules, rules, rules – and those fixed on the question of who is capable of performing a healing like this. They can’t straighten this out in their minds. So they have divided opinions. If you go down a bit further the parents are called in and you hear them give a very guarded testimony, very guarded. They are not going to expose themselves. To what? We find out in verses 22-23 that there was a vicious prejudice at work. That prejudice was on the part of the Pharisees. Notice what we are told 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.)”*

Jesus’ purpose in dealing with the scribes and Pharisees was to expose the real condition of their hearts. At verse 34 we see their true condition. They say to the man [who was healed], *“You were born in utter sin, and you would teach us? And they cast him out.”* John ends the account in verses 35-41 with two brief dialogues. In John 9:39 John records words which Jesus must have spoken in a different setting, a place where the scribes and Pharisees could hear Him. He wants them to hear this: *“For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.”* Beloved, that is a thematic statement for John’s Gospel. It is the intention of God through Jesus to lay bare the true condition of our hearts: that is His intention. It is exceedingly important that we appreciate this. We tend to try and understand the work of Jesus on a limited basis. We seek to understand the work of Jesus as limited to saving souls. And when we attempt to do that we distort who Jesus is and the reason for which God sent Him. Equally we misperceive and distort what has been revealed by God: Jesus was not sent by the Father only or solely to save souls. He came also to separate the seeing from the blind, those who would respond positively to the truth from those who would persist in resisting and rejecting. This is what happens when we have that distorted picture that Jesus just came to save people, we end up with this peculiar

picture of God. The picture is that God is trying to save as many people as He possibly can, but failing. That poses a significant question that each of us must wrestle with. Do we honestly believe and desire to worship a God who consistently fails to accomplish His purpose? God does not fail. He accomplishes whatever He sets out to do. At least that is the Bible’s point of view. Psalm 135:5-7, *“For I know that the Lord is great, and that our Lord is above all gods. Whatever the Lord pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps. He it is who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth, who makes lightnings for the rain and brings forth the wind from his storehouses.”*

We come to the closing verses, and they are critical for our well-being: *“Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, ‘Are we also blind?’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.”* There are two ways of summing that up I believe. 1) The one who would be saved must hear the word of God with an open mind. The one who would be saved must suspend their prejudices, the prejudices that say, “I already know, I already see, my judgment is adequate for a knowledge of what is true.”

I do not know the spiritual condition of each one of you. I know many of you are Christians. I would not entertain the notion that all of you are. But I commend to each of you the Word of God which able to save your souls if you will read it with an open mind.

Please pray with me: Father, in this encounter that we have read between Jesus, His disciples, the blind man and the Pharisees, oh my goodness! May we by Your grace follow after you and be a people who do the works of God. Forgive us if we have a judgmental spirit, Father. Correct our thinking. Forgive us if we have allowed our lives to become out of order so we have neither time nor resources to respond to others: forgive us for that. Father, if there is here anyone who has not yet seen that Jesus is indeed Your Son, Your gift of love to us, the One who gave His life that we might be saved, O Father, may the eyes be opened, the heart made tender, and the mind be brought to belief. We ask this, giving thanks in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. What is the difference between acting by obligation and acting by grace? Do you think perceived need brings with it the obligation to act?
2. Is justice or fairness important to you? Do you see it as important for others as much as for you?
3. If the way the world is does not favor, support or demonstrate justice, why do want it to and what does this say to us regarding God? (See Genesis 18:25 and Exodus 34:6-7)
4. What makes a non-judgmental response of compassionate help for others difficult?
5. Do you see “doing the works of God” as an important part of your walk of faith? As an important part of the general work of the church?
6. How would you explain the purpose of Sunday for the life of a Christian person, family and church to a non-believer?
7. Exposing sins is a tricky business. Do you think it is necessary? How can this be done so that it is not damaging to a person? (See Galatians 6:1-5)
8. In what ways is the picture of Jesus and His ministry most often distorted in your opinion? How might this be corrected?
9. “We are left with a picture of God trying to save as many as possible and failing with many, if not most.” Is this an accurate statement of what many people believe/feel about God?
10. Do you think God fails to achieve what He sets out to do?