

INTRODUCTION

There are all kinds of blindness. Sometimes husbands and wives can be blind to their own faults. A group of married adults were taking a computer science course at a community college. One evening, the instructor decided to have a little fun. So he divided the class up between the husbands and wives, and gave each group ten minutes to determine what gender computers ought to be.

So the class came back together and the men had voted unanimously that computers should be referred to in the feminine gender. They had four reasons for this. The husbands said, "The first reason computers should be spoken of in the feminine gender is because no one but their creator understands their internal logic. The second reason is because when computers communicate with each other they speak in code language only they can understand. The third reason is because every mistake you make is stored on their hard drive for later retrieval. The fourth reason is that as soon as you commit to one computer you find yourself spending half your paycheck on accessorizing it.

But of course, the women said computers MUST be referred to in the masculine gender. Why? They gave four reasons: First of all to get their attention, you have to turn them on. Secondly, they have a lot of data but still can't think for themselves. Third, they're supposed to help you solve problems, but half the time, they ARE the problem. And the final reason they gave was that as soon as you commit to one, you realize that if you'd waited a little longer, you could have gotten a better model.

That's funny. I believe most husbands and wives are blind to some of their shortcomings. In this passage, Jesus teaches us that there is another kind of blindness than physical blindness. And spiritual blindness can be the worst blindness of all.

This is the fourth message from John 9. In the beginning of this chapter Jesus sees a man blind from birth who had been reduced to a beggar. The man didn't ask Jesus for a miracle. Jesus took the initiative and spit in the dirt. He made mud, placed it on the man's eyes, and told him to go down the hill and wash it off in the Pool of Siloam. The man obeyed Jesus and when he washed off the mud, suddenly he could see.

The Pharisees interrogated the man who had been healed, but they couldn't refute his simple testimony. "This one thing I know. Once I was blind and now I see." So in anger, they kicked him out of the synagogue.

John 9:35-41. Jesus heard that they had thrown the man out, and when he found him, he asked, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" "Who is he, Sir, that I may believe in him?" he asked. Jesus answered, "You have seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." "I believe, Lord!" he said, and he worshiped him. Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment, in order that those who do not see will see and those who do see will become blind." Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard these things and asked him, "We aren't blind too, are we?"

"If you were blind," Jesus told them, "you wouldn't have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

When the Jewish leaders kicked him out, Jesus sought him out. The greatest miracle wasn't the opening of his eyes, but the opening of his heart to Jesus. I've said before that there is a miracle in every parable; and there is a parable in every miracle. And in the case of this miracle, we don't have to search very far to find the parable: In John 9:39 Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment, in order that those who do not see will see and those who do see will become blind."

In this parable Jesus claimed He had come to give sight to the blind. We don't have a problem with that. But then He said, "I've come to give blindness to those who can see." What does that mean?

He wasn't talking about making people physically blind, although He can do that. When I was a teenager I was inspired by the true story of Brother Andrew. He was called God's Smuggler. During the Cold War, he was a Pastor in Holland who was called by God to take Bibles behind the Iron Curtain, although it was illegal. So he would load up his VW Bug with Bibles and drive into the Soviet Union. Many times he would come up to a border crossing and the guards would be examining the contents of every car in line. So Brother Andrew would always pray, "Lord, during Your ministry, You opened the eyes of the blind. Now, Lord, please make these guards blind so they won't see these Bibles." His classic book is about the dozens of times when he was able to drive right through and the guards never stopped him.

But Jesus wasn't talking about physical blindness. He was speaking to the Pharisees who were suffering from spiritual blindness. They thought they could see but by rejecting the truth about Jesus, they were demonstrating that they were blind. In this message, I want to point out at least three ways that you could be experiencing the tragedy of spiritual blindness.

1. YOU MAY BE BLIND TO YOUR SINFUL CONDITION.

You know what a blind spot is. If you're driving in a car and are relying on your rearview mirrors to check the lanes, there are some spots you still won't be able to see—the back-right corner and the back-left corner. Those are blind spots. People have blind spots too. We can find ourselves at a point where we can't see our sinful condition.

These self-righteous Pharisees thought they were right with God because of their zeal to obey the laws of God. They were so blinded by their arrogance that they couldn't see their sin and they couldn't see that Jesus was the only sinless man to ever walk the face of the earth.

Jesus had many run-ins with these members of the Jewish mafia. In Matthew 15 Jesus called them blind guides. He said about the Pharisees: "They are blind guides. And if the blind guide the blind, both will fall into a pit." (Matthew 15:14) The Pharisees were blind to their own sinfulness, but to make matters worse, they were guiding others who were also blind.

It's pretty easy to sit here two thousand years after the fact and take long-range pot shots at the Pharisees who opposed Jesus. But the sad truth is we have many 21st Century Pharisees in our churches today.

The Christian cousins of the ancient Pharisees are the people we call legalists today. They have taken the pure Word of God and added a large number of extra layers of what they call "Christian behavior" so they can appear to be religious. Like a Pharisee, a modern legalist is more concerned with outward performance than inward purity. Are you a Pharisee?

I still laugh when Jeff Foxworthy goes through his "you might be a redneck" list. For instance, Jeff said, "If your two-year-old has more teeth than you...you might be a redneck. Or if your wallet and your dog are both on a chain...you might be a redneck."

I have a list of 10 ways you might know if you're a Legalist, a Pharisee. But I'm going to make these statements in the first person. See if any of these statements apply to you. This list isn't funny. It's serious.

I might be a Legalist (Pharisee) IF:

1. I believe God loves me more (or less) based on my behavior.
2. I tithe to the exact penny of my income.
3. I believe the King James Version is the only accurate Bible.
4. I believe everyone should dress a certain way to come to church.
5. I feel guilty if I miss a church activity.
6. If someone gives me a gift or does something nice to me, I am unsettled until I can reciprocate.
7. I believe God is best glorified by my preferred style of music.
8. I feel unlucky if I miss a day of Bible reading and prayer.
9. I think of God as more like a policeman and less like a fireman.
10. I have had several conversion experiences, but still doubt my salvation.

In Luke 18 Jesus told a story about two men going to pray. One man was a Pharisee and the other man was a tax collector. As the Pharisee prayed out loud, all he could do was to announce to God and everyone else how righteous he was. He prayed, "Oh, Lord I thank you I'm not like other sinners—greedy, unrighteous, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and I tithe on everything I receive." He almost broke his arm patting himself on the back.

Meanwhile the tax collector couldn't even lift up his head. He pounded his fist into his chest and said, "Oh God, please have mercy on me, a sinner."

Then Jesus said, "I tell you this man, the tax collector, went down to his house justified. For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but the one who humbles himself shall be exalted.

Let me give you a Texas translation of that: "He who struts his stuff before God will eventually be struck down. But when you admit you are as sinful as dirt beside God's purity, well then, God will pick you up and clean you up."

So, the question before us today is this. Do you identify more with that religious Pharisee or the tax collector? It's possible you can have blind spots when it comes to your own sin.

2. YOU MAY BE BLIND TO THE TRUTH ABOUT JESUS.

It's possible for truth to be right in front of you and you still can't see it. One night when Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson were camping out, they go to sleep and after a few hours, Holmes wakes up and nudges his friend. "Watson, wake up. Look up and tell me what you see."

Watson said, "I see millions and millions of stars." Holmes said, "So what does that tell you?"

Watson thought and said, "Hmm. Well astronomically, it tells me there are millions of galaxies in space, and the moon is in a waning crescent phase. Theologically, it tells me that God is a powerful Creator and that we are small and insignificant. Meteorologically, the cloudless sky tells me we should have beautiful weather tomorrow. That's what it tells me. How about you?"

Holmes said, "No, Watson, what it tells me is that someone has stolen our tent!"

Sometimes we are blind to what's happening right in front of us. These Pharisees were standing in front of the long-awaited Jewish Messiah. They were conversing with the Creator of the Heavens and the earth, yet they refused to accept the truth of who He was. They were blind to the truth.

Jesus spoke direct truth many times. But He would also wrap up truth in His parables and in His miracles. His disciples asked Him once why He spoke in Parables and Jesus quoted the words of His Father spoken through the prophet Isaiah. In Matthew 13:13 Jesus said, "This is why I speak to them in parables: 'Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.'"

God told Isaiah that even though he would preach God's truth. Many people would refuse to listen. Their ears were already shut. Their eyes were already closed. They were suffering from spiritual blindness.

For thousands of years, humanity thought the earth was the center of the universe, and the sun and stars orbited the earth. Aristotle and Ptolemy were among those who were convinced the earth was the center of the universe. That view became the official doctrine of the Catholic Church.

That position was challenged in the early 1600s by an Italian scientist named Galileo. He made a telescope and was the first man to look at the magnified surface of the moon. He discovered the seven moons of Jupiter. He examined the movement of the planets.

Galileo came to believe that the sun, not the earth, was the center of our solar system. The Catholic Church threatened Galileo to keep quiet, but in 1631 he published a book stating the earth was orbiting the sun. He was put on trial during the Inquisition and was found guilty of heresy. And here is the sad thing about his trial: He set up his telescope and invited the Cardinals, and the philosophers to look into the telescope to see for themselves. They refused to even look.

During the trial, Galileo wrote this letter to the German mathematician Johanne Kepler: "What do you have to say about the philosophers of this academy who are filled with stubbornness of an asp and do not want to look at either the planets, the moon, or the telescope? I have freely and deliberately offered them the opportunity a thousand times. Truly, just as the asp stops its ears so do these philosophers shut their eyes to the light of truth."

His book was banned by the Catholic Church and Galileo was forced to publically renounce his theory. He later died while he was still a prisoner. And only in 1991 did Pope John Paul II apologized for condemning Galileo. There is none so blind as he who will not see.

I don't need evidence to believe Jesus is the Son of God, but when you present the evidence of the bodily Resurrection of Jesus, some people refuse to look at the evidence. When you give the irrefutable evidence that over 60 Messianic predictions in the Old Testament were precisely fulfilled by Jesus of Nazareth, some people don't even want to examine the evidence. Their attitude is, "My mind is made up, don't confuse me with the facts." You may be blind to the truth about Jesus.

3. YOU MAY BE BLIND TO YOUR ABSOLUTE DEPENDENCE ON GOD.

The Apostle John, whose account we are studying, was exiled to the Island of Patmos when he was an old man. Jesus appeared to him there and gave him the Revelation. In the first chapter, John has a vision of the glorified Jesus. Then Jesus tells John to deliver a message to seven local churches. These churches represent all churches of all time. The last church to receive a message was the church at Laodicea. Jesus diagnosed them with spiritual blindness.

Jesus said, "So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am going to vomit you out of my mouth. For you say, 'I'm rich; I have become wealthy and need nothing,' and you don't realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked." (Revelation 3:16-17)

Jesus had some strong words to that church and to every lukewarm church. He said to the Christians there, "I'd rather you be burning with zeal, or frozen by tradition. But you are neither—you are lukewarm and because of that, I'm going to vomit you out." If you're a pharmacist or in the medical profession, the word Jesus used is *emeo* "today" and *emetic*, a medicine that induces vomiting.

Jesus is nauseated by indifferent, complacent, apathetic Christians. The church in Laodicea was a wealthy church in a medical and trading center. The members of the church would have been affluent. If you had visited First Baptist Church of Laodicea, the finest chariots would be parked

outside; some were eight horsepower, and even some were the more expensive solar-powered chariots. Inside the members would have been wearing the latest fashions with Rolex sundials on their wrists. Most of them would have had a second or third home up at the lake complete with a boat with inboard/outboard slaves. They had everything they wanted in terms of material possessions. They were so fat and happy that they had lost their sense of dependence on God. They said, "We are rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." But Jesus said, "No, you're poor, wretched, miserable, and BLIND." His next word was, "Church, you need to REPENT."

Does that sound like any church in East Texas? Folks, we have been so blessed by God that it would take us a week just to recount all the ways God has blessed our church. We've built almost \$80 million worth of buildings in the past twenty years and we don't have any debt.

As your pastor, I want to confess to you that this has been a source of pride for me. We've been the #1 church giving to missions in the Southern Baptist Convention, and I've had to ask God to forgive me for any pride about that.

Over the past twenty years, we've finished every calendar year with a budget surplus. As I've shared with you over the couple of months, we find ourselves today in a challenging position. We are a million dollars BEHIND our budget.

I think Jesus is speaking to us today and He saying. "Have you come to trust your own wealth, and your own abilities? Have you become lukewarm? Watch out, I could vomit you out of my mouth."

I don't want that to happen. I want us to come to a place of abject poverty and humility and say, "God, I repent. I thought I was rich and increased with goods and had need of nothing. But now I confess that we are poor and miserable and BLIND to our dependence on you."

I think many of the members of our church, including the pastor, have gone through a period of apathy and complacency. We are so blessed with buildings, staff, ministry, and brains, that we have forgotten to be utterly dependent on God for everything.

It was in the context of a lukewarm church that Jesus said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone [plural] will hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and fellowship with all of you and you with me." You probably thought that was a verse about a lost person opening their heart to Jesus. But it is an invitation for a lukewarm, self-sufficient church to open the door and say, "Jesus, please come in and resume control of your church. We admit we are blind. We need your light. Light the zeal in our hearts once again. Set our souls on fire."

So, there are couple of action steps I want to challenge you to make. First, ask God to reveal any areas of blindness in your life. Are you blind to the sin in your life? Are you blind to the truth about Jesus? You may not need to tick those off. But have you become blinded to your absolute and utter dependence on God. Have you become a lukewarm Christian?

Second, will you ask God to open the eyes of your heart? You have eyes in your head, but the Bible also teaches that you have eyes in your heart. Paul Baloche was leading worship out in Lindale, Texas in 2000 when he wrote the words to a song we all sing, "Open the eyes of my heart, Lord." He was inspired by the prayer of the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 1:18, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints."

CONCLUSION

In Ken Burn's recent PBS documentary on Country Music, he labeled Hank Williams as the Hillbilly Shakespeare. Williams struggled with alcoholism all of his adult life. But throughout all his struggles, his music gave hope to millions of people. One rainy night while driving back to Montgomery, Hank was drunk and asleep in the back seat of the car his mother was driving. As they neared the Montgomery Airport, his mother said, "Hank, we're almost home, I can see the airport light."

The next morning Hank took a pen and wrote these powerful words:

I wandered so aimless life filed with sin
I wouldn't let my dear savior in
Then Jesus came like a stranger in the night
Praise the lord I saw the light.

I saw the light I saw the light
No more darkness no more night
Now I'm so happy no sorrow in sight
Praise the lord I saw the light.

We can only hope that Hank believed his own lyrics. He continued to fight the demon of alcohol. In the early morning hours of January 1, 1953, exactly two weeks before I was born, a West Virginia State Trooper found Hank dead in the back seat of a Cadillac with an empty bottle of whiskey. He had sung, "No more sorrow, no more night." But those of us who know the Lord understand that if full of sorrow and night and that's why we have to keep walking in the light of the world, Jesus. Are you walking in the light today?

OUTLINE

The Parable of the Miracle

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Action Plan:

- Ask God to reveal any areas of blindness in your life.
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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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