

# Eyeglasses from God

1 Samuel 16:1-13 & John 9:1-41  
March 26, 2017

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## INTRODUCTION

I used to go to Queen of the Apostle Retreat Centre in Mississauga. It had the most beautiful sanctuary. The altar looked like a huge rock. The cross was behind it with Jesus was on the cross, but not nailed to the cross. From afar, it looked as though he were ascending up to heaven.

The ceiling was a dark blue. It looked like a night sky, filled with twinkling lights ... or at least, that's how I saw it without my glasses, and it was a marvelous view. When I put my glasses on, however, I saw row upon row of Christian symbols – crosses, communion cups, baptismal fonts ... and nothing twinkled.

Wearing glasses may improve your eyesight, but you may not always like what you see - which brings us to today's scripture passages. Their message is obvious:

- God's ways are not our ways; and
- God sees things differently than we do.

But ...

- So what?
- What does that really tell us? Why do we need to know this?
- What difference does it make in our lives?
- How do they challenge us?

To answer those questions, we need to take a closer look at the passages themselves.

## BIBLICAL EXPLORATION

### Samuel Anoints David

In our Old Testament lesson, God has already decided that Saul is not fit to be king and commands the prophet Samuel to anoint the next king of Israel who will be one of Jesse's sons.

Samuel goes to Bethlehem to meet with Jesse and his family. He looks over Jesse's sons one-by-one ... but God hasn't picked any of them. Finally, they call the youngest son in from the field – it's David and he's the one God has picked.

The story makes two very important points:

- God is directly involved in the life of the people. He had picked Saul to be king. Here, he speaks to Samuel and picks David to be the next king. God shows himself to be part of people's lives.
- God judges people by different standards than we do. **“God sees not as a man sees; the Lord looks on the heart.”**

God doesn't pick Saul's children. He doesn't pick the oldest, or tallest. Instead, God chooses the youngest, the least experienced, and – it seems – someone who is handsome but not necessarily regal-looking.

Of course, there is a deeper level to the story that we can see because we have an advantage that Samuel doesn't. We know what happened afterwards. David was a ladies' man, an adulterer, a murderer, and perhaps not even a great king – after all, his reign ended with civil war.

And yet ... God chose him. Why? Even with his flaws, and knowing – as God must have known – that David would break God's laws, God chose him.

What did God see in David? Why didn't God reject David when he messed up the way he rejected Saul? What was that special something that God saw in David and made him willing to overlook David's failings?

Again, we have an advantage because we know more of David's story and can tentatively answer these questions. We know David composed some of the Psalms. We know that when he brought the ark to Jerusalem, he danced naked in the streets praising God. Could it be - was it possible that David's passion for God – that inner faith, trust and love for God – made him so special that God was willing to overlook his failings/sins?

### Jesus Heals the Blind Man

Our Gospel passage delivers a similar message but challenges us to go further. Jesus sees a blind man, and heals him on the Sabbath. The blind man ends up in a religious discussion with the religious leaders about what had happened – and he recognizes God's work in his life even when the religious leaders don't.

Once again we have God involved in people's lives. Once again we have God judging people differently than we might expect. **This time, however, God allows us to see the difference.**

**On the one hand**, we have the religious leaders who had committed themselves to God and were concerned with following God's laws and living a life that would please God. They kept God's commandments as best they could. If anything, they went that extra mile to make the commandments just a little stricter to ensure they were on the right path.

Of course, we don't know what their motives for being stricter were but there are at least three possibilities:

- They wanted to push themselves to be **as religious as possible**, as close to God as possible and they did this by trying to do *more than* God required.
- They pushed themselves to the extreme so they could tell others **how holy and how superior they were to others**; everyone else was beneath them.
- **They were patriotic**. There was a tradition that if one person could keep *all* 613 of God's laws for one Sabbath, then the Messiah would come and defeat Israel's enemies. By adding extra time to the Sabbath and requirements, they hoped to make sure they kept the right 24 hours.

In other words, the religious authorities saw themselves as good people who believed in God's commandments and believed they were following them.

**On the other hand**, we have the blind man. He had probably broken some of God's laws – we don't know and aren't told but it's pretty to conclude that he may not have known if someone unclean was close by. Their presence, according to the Law, would have been made unclean him.

Furthermore, remember the Temple in Jerusalem was divided into sections – the closer you got to the Holy of Holies the more pure you had to be. You had to exchange ordinary animals for special ones or ordinary money to temple coins. The blind man was defective so he wouldn't have been allowed to get very far into the Temple. What was obvious to "everyone" at the time was that he wasn't fit to be in God's presence. "Everyone" knew this and so it was natural that they ask Jesus, "Who sinned?" – the man or his parents. Obviously, someone had or he wouldn't be blind.

Jesus' answer was unexpected. The man was blind so God could do something special through him. And to make the point even clearer, Jesus broke the law by healing the man on the Sabbath. **God's ways of looking at people are not the same as ours.**

## The Aftermath

But that's not the end of the story and the reaction to Jesus' cure of the blind man presents a challenge for us today.

The **religious authorities** – the ones whom we would think knew God best – could not accept the cure. Their reasoning was simple:

- God would never accept anyone who broke His commandments.
- Therefore, Jesus could not be a prophet or holy in any way since he had broken the law about working on the Sabbath.
- And therefore the cure did not – and could not – have come from God.

The alternative was that the man had never been blind at all so there had been no cure.

**Pick.** – Either way the religious authorities could dismiss what Jesus had done and dismiss the man who had been blind. Their minds were closed to God acting in a way they disapproved of. The Gospel tells us that they were blind but didn't know it.

As for the **blind man** – he had been physically blind at the beginning of the story but gained not only his sight but also an insight into Jesus. He was open to God in a way the religious authorities weren't. He recognized Jesus as someone from God and responded accordingly. One unsolicited encounter with Jesus – and the man born blind recognized Jesus as Lord, and had enough courage to challenge the authorities by asking, "how can you deny what happened?" He took a stand, "I believe" and worshipped. Jesus responded by revealing more of who he was to the man.

**In other words, in some ways, the blind man was closer to God than were the religious authorities of the day.**

## BRIDGE

And so, the question for us is **where are we in the stories?** How open are we to God acting in ways we disapprove of?

## A MESSAGE FOR TODAY

### God Breaking into History

In both stories, we have God breaking into history – breaking into people's lives, becoming involved in what's happening and doing something – anointing a king or healing a blind man.

He breaks into our lives as well – **have we recognized him? Have we made God a part of our life?**

### A Message of Comfort

In both stories, we also have a word of hope or comfort. Let's face it – we're not perfect. None of us. We have all broken God's laws:

- I bet some of us have lied – for good or ill – at least once in our life.
- I bet at least some of us have been envious of what others have or are – how many of us have ever said, "I wish I had a car like ...?" or "... a home like ...?"
- I bet most of us have broken the Sabbath – the day of rest – whether we observe it on Saturday or Sunday.
- Of course – none of us have ever speeded while driving have we?

The fact is that we are imperfect. We have not lived up to our potential. We have not lived up to what God expects us to do or be. All of us have broken God's laws sometime in our lives. None of us want God to judge us based on our actions.

Both passages say that we don't have to worry. God does look at people in a different than we do. He looks into our hearts – our innermost beings – what he sees there may outweigh what he sees us doing.

Both passages emphasize that God can and does look past a person's failings and sinfulness. He can accept us. He can forgive us, even if we have trouble forgiving ourselves.

Following Jesus means, in part, accepting that we are a forgiven people and that God is at work in our lives transforming us – working to develop that inner quality – that openness to him that both David and the blind man had.

**The question we need to ask ourselves is: When God looks at us, what does he see? How passionate are we for God?**

### **A Challenge for Today**

Now for the challenge. The Gospel lesson doesn't end with the cure. It doesn't end by emphasizing how God looks at life differently than we do. It ends with the debate between the *religious authorities* – who were closed to seeing God choose people they rejected and act in a way they could not accept – and the *blind man* – who came upon Jesus in an unexpected way, was cured by Jesus without asking, and who was open to seeing God acting in his life and courageous enough to respond even when challenged.

Are we more like *the blind man or the religious authorities*?

Are we so sure of what's right and what's wrong – and of how God judges and condemns others – that we are incapable of seeing God at work in unexpected ways?

Are we capable of seeing good in people we judge to be sinners – and worse than us of course? Can we see God working in their lives? Can we recognize that ***maybe they are closer to God than we are?***

That's hard for us to accept at times. Sometimes wearing God's eyeglasses shows us things we would rather not see and compels us to welcome those we would rather condemn.

As Christians, we are called to be God's body on earth – to make God visible to others. One of the first steps is to put on God's eyeglasses so we see others as God sees them – to see past the obvious and look into people's hearts – to search for their passion for God.

**But, looking at others through God's eyes changes how we see people. Are we ready to do that?**

### **CONCLUSION**

Both stories seem so simple. Their message seems so straightforward. Chances are we already knew that God sees things differently than we do.

The challenge is *how are we going to respond?*

- Do we have the courage to let God become an integral part of our life?
- Do we have the courage to be passionate about our own faith?
- Do we have the courage to recognize someone else's passion for God – even if it's someone we would like to reject or judge?
- Do we have the courage to put on God's eyeglasses so we can see others as God might?

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AMEN