

The Debate John 9:1-41

It is interesting how a debate can either clarify your stance on a specific topic, persuade you to move to the other side, or make you even more confused. Whatever the case may be, there is clearly two distinct and opposing sides. Today our text brings to light a subject that has continued to be debated for over two thousand years. What is this topic? The Gospel of John refers to this topic as the true identity of Jesus. In order to understand John's perspective, we first need to clarify the audience to which John is writing. The original readers lived two or three generations after Jesus had died and ascended into heaven. They grew up hearing the stories of Jesus and how his ministry of healing, teaching, and preaching proved he was the Messiah. However, this new generation of Christians struggled to determine which parts of the stories they believed to be true.

John shares the story of the blind beggar to help the reader see that the best defense is to hang on to the facts that are known to be true. John begins to unfold this story in chapter 8 where Jesus, in conversation with the Pharisees, reveals his true identity. In an attempt to prove Jesus is not the Messiah, the Pharisees try to catch Jesus in a sinful act.

Accusations are made that cause those listening to the conversation to pick up stones in preparation for stoning this sinner. Jesus and the disciples narrowly escape to the outer region of the city where the beggars have gathered to collect alms. The disciples had been taught by society that disabilities were caused by either the person's sins or the sin of their parents. Therefore, out of curiosity, they asked Jesus who sinned to cause this man to be blind from birth. Jesus paused long enough to respond by saying no one had sinned; but rather, this man's blindness has another purpose. Jesus used this opportunity to once again prove to the Pharisees that he was the Messiah, who came to save the world. After he had given the man instructions, Jesus disappeared leaving this man to explain his miraculous cure.

One interesting fact is how this blind man never asked to be cured, nor do we know if he has ever heard of Jesus. According to John, he knew enough about Jesus that he obeyed and washed at the pool of Siloam where he saw his first view of God's world. Then again, if you had mud made of spittle from a stranger wouldn't you want to go to the closest place to wash your face? Another interesting tidbit is how, upon returning to his home, some of the people did not recognize him. Since they could

not come to a consensus, they took him to the Pharisees for judgment. John's story tells us the Pharisees missed the miracle. They were more intrigued by who the healer was and the method he used to heal. As this healed man shared his story, he could only identify Jesus by name and that he spit in his hand, made mud, spread it on this man's eyes, and said to go wash in the pool of Siloam. This was the evidence the Pharisees needed to win the debate that Jesus was not the Messiah because he broke the Sabbath laws of healing and working by making mud on God's Holy day. Twice the blind man was interrogated by the Pharisees. Twice he told his story. Each time his faith led him to put his trust in the fact that it really was the Messiah that healed him.

The few facts he could share about Jesus helped him realize Jesus' power and authority truly came from God. The blind man's purpose was to share the facts so others would believe. The problem was that the Pharisees were so intent on proving Jesus was a sinner they forgot to see the miracle in front of them. They were focused on keeping the traditions of Moses, which held the blinders that prevented them from seeing that they were already standing face to face with God. They argued with the blind man about Jesus and his actions. The blind man responded by

identifying Jesus as a prophet which lead to another set of grueling questions. As tempers rise between the Pharisees and the blind man, the blind man lost his cool, made some disrespectful comments, and was excommunicated from the community.

Even though this blind man had never seen Jesus' face, he was willing to stand up and tell the world how Jesus opened his eyes. John's message to the Christian community strongly emphasized that you do not have to see the physical Jesus in order to present your argument. All they needed was to know the truth about Jesus. They had all the facts they necessary to put their faith in God. Now their faith would lead them to enter the debate and stand strong for what they believed to be true about God.

John also warns the reader to be aware of the dangerous trap into which the Pharisees fell. Be aware of focusing only on the details of the traditions. While it is important to have a format through which people can worship God, keep the purpose of God ahead of the traditions and rituals of the day. It is easy to get caught up in the process assuming God is present, but for those who have never seen God ,verbalizing how God's presence can be experienced is vital. As a Christian community, the

purpose is to invite people to come and meet Christ face to face. Before that can happen, Christians need to see Christ's face for his or her self and know what it looks like in his or hers own eyes.

Today, we face the same dilemma as the early Christians. We have not physically seen Jesus face to face, but we have experienced God's grace in our lives. We have all the facts we need to enter into the debate of Christ's identity. The problem is how do we do it? The first step is in talking about God. How would you argue Jesus is the Messiah? This is a debate that will come before us again. The scriptures tell us that one day Christ will return. It also tells us there will be false prophets proclaiming they are Christ. How will we know who to believe? The answer to this question really is rather simple. We learn as much as we can about God. We teach our children not only the stories but how to find Christ's presence in our world. We learn how to debate God's true identity with support from the biblical facts.

As we begin the descent of our Lenten season, search your heart to find the place where you can go to see Christ's face. Once you find that spot, notice how clear your vision is of God's world. The purpose of the blind man was to prove that only God's Son, the Messiah, could create

such a miracle. It wasn't until after he was separated from the rituals of the church that the blind man truly saw Jesus as Lord and Savior. There are many in this world that still live in blindness when it comes to seeing God. They will argue their belief in hopes of discovering another view that will change their minds. Can you hold God's ground in a debate of Christ's identity? We will soon be celebrating Christ's resurrection. How will you share this news? Who will you invite to come and see Christ's resurrected self? Amen.