

## *Three Things a Blind Man Saw - that Many Still Can't See Today* Acts 22:1-21

### **Introduction**

Sometimes ago I became curious about the modern custom of the white cane carried by blind people when they go walking. I assume that he is blind because he always carries a red-tipped white cane that he uses to carefully tap-tap-tap his way along the edge of the sidewalk. Do you know the origin of the White Cane? I didn't. In fact, I had never given it much thought. Curiosity got the better of me last week though, so I consulted my encyclopedia and some Internet sources. Here is what I found. The following is a quote from a website that sells every kind of cane imaginable, including the white ones for the blind, often referred to, I learned, as "shooter sticks." Since it's the only explanation I could find, I'll assume it is accurate unless I discover otherwise. Here is the quote..."The White Cane is a tool for independence and a symbol of our sight impaired citizens. The... White Cane has its beginning in the time between the two World Wars. James Biggs of Bristol [England] claims to have invented it in 1921. After losing his sight and feeling threatened by traffic near his home, he painted his walking stick white to be more visible to motorists. Ten years later, in February 1931, Guilly d'Herbemont began a national White Stick Movement for the sight impaired in France. In May of the same year the British Broadcasting Company suggested that white sticks should be given out to the sight impaired, and that the white stick or cane should become a universal symbol to indicate that a person was blind or visually impaired.

The White Cane is not only a tool, but also a staff that recognizes independence." I want to talk about blindness this morning. There is physical blindness and there is spiritual blindness. Unfortunately there is no white cane that can be carried to identify the latter.

The Bible passage we're going to look at in this message contains both kinds of vision impairment. The blind man is Saul of Tarsus who would later be Paul the Apostle. While we're probably not accustomed to thinking of Paul as physically or spiritually blind, he was nonetheless, blind to critical spiritual truth in his early life. Then God struck him with physical blindness for a period of about three days. It was during this sightless time that he really began to "see" important spiritual truth – truth that many sighted people still cannot see today. Thus the title of my sermon is: Three Things a Blind Man Saw that Many Still Can't See Today.

Our text this morning is Acts 22:1-21. Please join me there and follow along as I read it. (Read Acts 22:1-21)

As I have already mentioned, sometimes the blind can see things more clearly than the sighted. That was the case here with Saul. Here are some things he "saw" while he was blind.

## 1. He Saw that the Religion of His Parents Couldn't Save Him.

(Read v. 3)

Here we see Paul's roots in both the race and the religion of the Jews. In flawless Hebrew dialect, he laid out his Jewish pedigree before his accusers. He was a Jew by birth (a "Hebrew of Hebrews" as described elsewhere(2)) born of pureblooded Hebrew stock. Though birthed in Tarsus of Cilicia, he was raised in Jerusalem, the holiest city in all of Judaism. Though his father was a Roman citizen (we know that because it's the only way Paul could have been a citizen by birth as he says in verse 28) his parents had resisted assimilation into the Hellenistic lifestyle around them – a powerful testimony to the staunch nature of their faith. In great anticipation of their boy's future and deference to their native tribe of Benjamin, they named him "Saul" after the most famous king in that tribe's lineage. It only follows then that they passed their solid faith along to their son. Serious about young Saul's religious training, they secured one of the two most widely known and respected Hebrew Rabbis of their day, Gamaliel, to instruct the boy in the Jewish faith. I can only imagine what the "tuition" was for that school!

It isn't hard to surmise the pride that Saul's parents took in their high-achieving son as he continued to excel in the best traditional Hebrew education of the day. It's also easy to envision the strong sense of loyalty young Saul would feel toward his faithful parents as a result of the powerful start they had given him. That loyalty was also felt in Saul's desire to protect the religion of his fathers from those that he considered enemies. That, of course, would include the followers of one Jesus of Nazareth, whom Saul considered to be an impostor Messiah.

The trajectory of Saul's rise to prominence in the faith of his family was still rising when he met Jesus on the road to Damascus, and the bright light of the glory of God's Son blinded him for three days. During that time of blindness he began to "see" for the first time what must have been a horrific realization. He had been wrong about the Christians he was persecuting.

They were God's people.

Furthermore, the religion of his parents was now wrong, too.

It's a tough spot to be in when you learn that the faith you were brought up in does not match the standard of God's Word. Many people never get beyond it. They learn more truth than they learned from their parents – truth that either their family didn't know or truth they weren't willing to face – and they are confronted with one of the toughest decisions of their lives. Do they embrace the newly found truth or do they turn away from it because they just cannot bring themselves to accept that mom and dad were wrong?

The mind runs through a lot of questions at the time of such a decision. I'm sure Saul must have asked them. "Mom and Dad were so serious and dedicated to their faith. How could I turn away from what they taught me?"

As I said, some folks just can't (or won't) get beyond that question. They turn away from loyalty to God and truth in deference to family.

"Do you mean to tell me, Dave, that God expect us to choose between loyalty to God and loyalty to parents?"

That's exactly what I'm saying and the New Testament is crystal clear about it.

Listen to what Paul would write later about his dearly loved Jewish heritage that he left behind when he became a Christian. Speaking of his Hebrew kin who did not embrace Jesus as Messiah, he wrote in Romans 10:1-3: "Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation." You see he was willing to admit the truth – that without Christ, they were unsaved. He continues: "For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God."

The blinded Saul saw what so many who are sighted are unwilling to see - that zeal without proper knowledge, even if it involves your parents, cannot save you.

It's tough to make the choice between the faith we were raised in and the truth we have come to understand, but it is critical and necessary. Jesus expects us to make it if needed. He said in Matthew 10:37-38: "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."

In a day like ours, where truth is so often morphed to fit convenience and personal whim, such a statement is very unpopular. But it is still true.

A second thing the blinded Saul of Tarsus saw was this:

## **2. He Saw that in Spite of Where he had Been, God had a Plan for his Life.**

Saul went on into the city of Damascus, blinded from the encounter with Jesus, led by the hand by the very ones he had only shortly before been leading himself, seeing nothing with his eyes but seeing many things for the first time with his mind. To help Saul with his newfound "sight," God sent a devout Jewish Christian named Ananias. (Read v. 12-13)

Can you see the irony in that? The last thing Saul sees before he is blinded is the city of Damascus coming into view where he would carry out his vicious intent of persecution against the Christians. Now the first thing Saul sees standing before him when his eyes clear again is one of the very Christians he had come to persecute! But the blind man has seen things he never saw before.

Now he sees this Christian standing before him in an entirely new light. Jesus changes our perspective!

Ananias gives him a typical Jewish greeting: "Brother Saul, receive your sight."

I say a "typical Jewish greeting" because some folks teach quite erroneously that Saul was a saved Christian at this point because Ananias calls him "brother." That cannot be however, because down in verse 16 we see that he was still in his sins. Verse 16 says, "Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins." If Saul were saved at the time he first saw Ananias, he would have no sins to wash away. No one is in a saved condition if they are still in their sins.

So Ananias greets him and delivers the message God had for him.  
(Read v. 14)

Note the plan that is laid out for Saul. It had three elements.

- Saul would "know His will" – Like the other Apostles, Saul (soon to be Apostle Paul) would have special revealed knowledge of the will of God so he could function as an Apostle of Christ. As was promised to the twelve in John 14:26 and John 16:13, the Holy Spirit would "teach him all things" and "guide him into all truth."
- Saul would also "see the Righteous One" - Saul had not spent three years with Jesus from the time of "the baptism of John until the day He was taken up," as the rest of the Apostles had. That was the requirement for being an Apostle of Christ according to Acts 1:22 and it is one of several reasons why we do not have living Apostles of Christ today. It is likely that Ananias' promise here refers to a comparable time that Paul would spend with Jesus in a supernatural way since immediately after this he went away into Arabia for an extended period.(4) During this time he would do the third thing Ananias mentions...
- Saul would "hear an utterance from His mouth." – The twelve other apostles were taught by word of mouth by Jesus and also "led into all truth" by the Holy Spirit.(5) It seems that the same things were now afforded to Saul.

For what purpose had God appointed these things for Saul?  
(Read v. 15)

The terminology here matches Jesus' words to the other Apostles almost exactly. In Acts 1:8 the other Apostles were told, "...you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." Just like them, Saul would be a special apostolic witness. The scope of his witness would be "to all men," as Ananias says here, just as the scope of the other apostles would be "to the remotest part of the earth" as Jesus mentioned in Acts 1:8.

Today the teachings of Christ and the Apostles contained in the New Testament contain the witness of salvation through Jesus Christ to the whole world – to "all men," and "even to the remotest part of the earth."

What a purpose this was for Saul! Even more remarkably, this purpose was pronounced upon a now former persecutor of the church.

What about you and me? Does God have a purpose for us regardless of what kind of background we have? You bet He does. It is seen in several places but the one that seems most obvious to me is Paul's teaching in the book of Ephesians.

(Read Ephesians 4:14-16)

What I want you to see is in verse 16. It says that the "whole body" (that is, the church) is "fitted," that is probably evangelism, and "held together," that is probably edification, "by that which every joint supplies, according to the working of each individual part." That would be us. That in turn, says Paul, "cause the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love," which is God's main purpose today.

Not everyone is an Apostle. In fact, there were only 13 Apostles of Christ – 12 to the Jews and one to the Gentiles. But all of us have a part in the furtherance of the gospel and the growth and maintenance of the church. All of us have a place. All of us have gifts God has given us that are to be used for the growth of His body. And it is God's plan that we use them for that purpose.

"Oh, but He can't use me. I don't have anything to offer."

Look again at Ephesians 4. Paul said, "by that which every joint supplies." To the one who might say that God has no place for him or her I would ask simply,

"What part of 'every joint' don't you understand?"

God has a purpose for you and it is your primary reason for living. It is His reason for calling you by the gospel. If you don't already know that it is either because you haven't yet been taught or you haven't been listening or the devil has somehow succeeded in convincing you otherwise. Really, it's so clear that a blind man could see it.

God has a purpose for you and it is your responsibility to figure it out and put yourself into it.

What else did the blind man see?

### **3. He Saw that Although He Thought He was Right with God, He Still Needed to be Saved.**

Can religious zeal save us?

Can membership in a majority religious group save us?

Can sincerity save us?

These are questions people have difficulty with today whenever they are confronted with truth that doesn't match that which they have previously held.

Let's take these and consider each of them against the backdrop of this passage.

There are people today who are deeply zealous in their religious traditions. The leader of the Iranian revolution, the late Ayatollah Khomeini, is entombed in Tehran. Some visitors to the mosque where his body lies, in traditional penance, chain themselves to the metal fence around the casket and beat and mutilate their bodies to show their zeal for Allah. In other parts of the world those who profess Christ allow their bodies to be nailed to crosses and crawl for miles on bloody knees to show their zeal. Still others give great portions of their income, go on pilgrimages, practice self-denial, attend every meeting that pertains to their faith, feed the hungry and give to the poor. No one would argue with the fact that these people are zealous for their beliefs. Yet is it possible that after such acts of passion, such people could still be lost?

If zeal for religion alone could save us, there would be no better example of it than Saul of Tarsus. Verses 4 and 5 of our text make his zeal very clear.

(Read Acts 22:4-5)

Of himself Paul wrote in Galatians 1:14: "I was ... extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions."

If religious zeal alone could save, then Saul was saved long before he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. Yet in verse 16, Ananias tells him that he needs to have his sins washed away. He was still unsaved.

Many today figure that they are secure with God and on their way to heaven because they are members of religious organizations with hundreds of thousands or even millions of followers. They reason, "How could so many people possibly be wrong?" To them there is safety in numbers of adherents.

Yet if membership in a majority religious group (sheer numbers against numbers) could save, then Saul was more in the majority in his day when he practiced the religion of his fathers than when he became a Christian. In his day most people considered Christianity to be a splinter group of Judaism. Yet in our text, Ananias tells Saul to get up and be baptized because he needs to be saved. His membership in a group that, at the time, was larger than Christianity did not save him.

Jesus verifies this idea, by the way, in Matthew 7:13-14 when He said, "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it." Trusting the majority is not necessarily the safe route.

What about sincerity? Many people today believe that as long as they are sincere in their religion that's all that matters. How could God possibly turn away someone who serves his or her religion with a whole heart?

Again, you would be hard pressed to find anyone any more sincere than Rabbi Saul, yet there's Ananias in verse 16 telling him that he needs to be saved.

If being zealous, if being in the majority, if being sincere, if any or all of these things could save, then Saul was saved before he ever met Jesus.

Again, the words of Jesus are appropriate here. In Matthew 7:21-23 He said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'"

The sobering thing about those words to me is that this isn't referring to those in non-Christian religions and cults. It's referring to those who call Jesus "Lord" and do great religious works in His name and are surprised when He rejects them. Not everyone who claims to be a Christian is going to make it.

Saul was sure he was right with God when he left for Damascus. Three days of blindness however, allowed him to "see" that he was wrong and that he still needed to be saved.

## **Conclusion**

An elderly woman stood on a busy street corner, hesitant to cross because there was no traffic signal. As she waited, a gentleman came up beside her and asked, "May I cross over with you?" Relieved, she thanked him and took his arm.

The path they took was anything but safe. The man seemed to be confused as they dodged traffic and walked in a zigzag pattern across the street. "You almost got us killed!" the woman exclaimed in anger when they finally reached the curb.

"You walk like you're blind!" "I am," he replied. "That's why I asked if I could cross with you."

When it comes to spiritual truth, we must not "blindly" assume that all those who offer to help us can see clearly themselves. At the very least we should request that they give account for what they teach us from the Scripture. And in some instances it is far better for us to learn to "see" for ourselves.