

Blind to the Truth

(Conversion of Saul on Damascus Road)

23 October Acts 9:1-19

Have you ever heard the expressions:

'The blind truth' & 'Blind to the truth'? When you think about them, they actually mean quite different things.

The expression, 'the blind truth' is much like the expression, 'blind justice'. Have you seen statues outside courthouses portraying 'blind justice'.

They are of a blindfolded woman holding a set of scales in one hand and a sword by her side.

This is meant to instil confidence in us toward our appointed judges as they impartially consider (weigh) the evidence before them and make a judgment of truth based on the rule of law. She is blinded so as **not** to be influenced by bribery and corrupt practices around her - ie. nudge, nudge, wink, wink: say no more!

This image of the woman actually represents the Greek goddess Themis, or the Roman goddess Justitia (from whom we get the word justice).

The expression 'the blind truth', like 'blind justice', conveys the idea that truth must be blind to its own consequences. Let's face it, truth sometimes hurts, but that of itself is no reason to suppress it. If we suppress the reliability of truth, what are we left with?

Sometimes people try to avoid or blind truth for their own purposes. We call these lies, and they can sometimes be quite colourful: eg. I am sure you have all heard of a white lie, but what about a black, yellow or even green lie. Ultimately though, a lie is a lie; it suppresses truth and leaves us with no basis for trust and dependability in any of our relationships.

The other expression, 'blind to the truth', is actually of more concern for us today. Throughout the ages mankind has been in search of truth. From time to time, there are those who stand up and declare their latest theory or philosophy to be 'the truth', and they gather around them a band of followers.

History is littered with such characters and examples, and most have fallen by the wayside after a few years or generations. The words of Gamaliel come to mind in Acts 5 '*.. for if this purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.*' (vss.38-39)

Even today, we have people who claim the truth about many different issues including medicine, astronomy, the environment, genetics, politics and religion, just to mention a few. I think Gamaliel's argument is rather sound, and we continue to listen, evaluate and make our decisions on the worth of these arguments after much prayerful consideration.

If we ignore or avoid these discussions and debates then we choose to remain blind to the truth of God that may be contained within them.

The apostle Paul, formerly known as Saul, was in a similar situation. He had been raised in a Jewish home and, at an early age, began his studies to become a Priest/Pharisee among his people.

He was an excellent student and became proficient in his knowledge of the law.

Paul himself spoke of his heritage in Acts 22:3 *'I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city (Jerusalem) at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today.'*

Yes, Paul was a student of Gamaliel, and yet he set out to brutally persecute the followers of Jesus without seeking to first understand and evaluate what they were saying and how they were living.

Paul was **'blind to the truth'** of what God had done through the Lord Jesus and was blind to the truth of what God was doing in the lives of His disciples.

He had heard the many claims that Jesus had risen from the dead and been seen by many people in the days following the resurrection, BUT, he had chosen, because of vested interests, to listen instead to the lies of the authorities, who failed to produce any body or evidence to refute the claims of the early church. Paul was caught up in the zeal of opposition to Jesus, and blindly followed the mind of the majority.

If only he had talked with people like Nicodemus or Joseph of Arimathea. If only Saul had sought out the apostles and searched out God's truth in all that had happened to Jesus, but he did not.

The story of Paul's journey to Damascus is set in this mindset of Saul, where he is blinded to God's truth, and is instead, sure and confident in the lies and vested interests of the ruling Sadducees.

As Saul approached Damascus, we read in vs.3, *'.. suddenly a light shone around him from heaven.'* God was wanting to get Saul's attention, and this was certainly one way. But, **there was more!**

Saul fell to the ground. Now, we don't know whether the intensity of the light forced Saul to the ground, or whether Saul realised this was from God and so knelt, touching his face to the ground in worship. We are also **not** told if Saul's attendants saw the light.

What we are told is that Saul then heard a voice, *'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?'* It was the voice of Jesus speaking to Saul (vs.5).

We read in vs.7 that Saul's companions also heard the voice, but did not see anyone. This was certainly something that defied normal rational explanation. **Still, there was more!**

When the conversation was concluded, Saul lifted his head and opened his eyes to find that he was blind, physically blind. The irony is that Saul's spiritual blindness, when he was blind to the truth, was now gone, and physical blindness had taken its place.

Saul saw this as his moment of salvation and conversion. From this moment on he was a transformed man, a new person in Christ Jesus.

As Paul later wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:17,

'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.'

Now, some of you may be thinking, why didn't God get **my** attention in such a wonderfully dramatic way? Well, be thankful He didn't!

For many of you, who were raised in a Christian home, or nurtured in a Christian youth group, God only needed to speak to your hearts and minds in a quiet, gentle way. You were open to His calling and responded. Yours was a gentle new birth which has laid an excellent foundation for your ongoing relationship with the Lord, and you have been on a relatively steady journey ever since.

When God has to do something as dramatic as what happened to Saul, it is to get your attention, because you probably haven't been listening for Him, or you have been quite stubborn or rebellious.

The subsequent conversion and journey to maturity of faith can then be somewhat tortuous and uncomfortable. What is most important, however, is not so much the events surrounding our salvation and conversion, but more importantly our ongoing life and witness for the Lord.

For Paul, his new life had only just begun. He had much to learn, **and so much to unlearn**. Years of hollow legalism and ritualism, years of blindly following the academic crowd of the day, were to be replaced with a new and exciting appreciation of God's heart, mind and will revealed in the scriptures.

In his future ministry, Paul would, time and time again, quote passages from the Old Testament as if they were a fresh revelation to him, despite the fact that he had memorised so many of them in his former life as a Pharisee. Paul would, over the succeeding years, develop a new appreciation of the Lord Jesus as God's revelation **to all of mankind**.

How is it that he hadn't seen it all before? Because he had been blinded to the truth! He had thought that the only way to know God was through academic study, ritual and argument, rather than a vital prayer relationship. As Paul later wrote to Timothy, *'...(they are) always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.'* 2 Timothy 3:7.

It would seem that this kind of spiritual blindness is not new to mankind.

The prophet Jeremiah also wrote about it when he said: ‘.. *O foolish people, without understanding, who have eyes and see not, and who have ears and hear not ..*’ (Jeremiah 5:21-22).

And the Lord Jesus said in Matthew 13:15: ‘*For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed ..*’

With all the needs of humanity today, and the huge sums of money being given to alleviate poverty, cure diseases, fight corruption and promote justice, the biggest problem of all still remains: spiritual blindness.

If people cannot see and know real truth - God’s truth, then most of the decisions they will make for their future lives will be flawed and based on half truths, fanciful theories and persuasive rhetoric.

The present age of relativism, where each person decides their own truth, as it best suits them, can only lead to the breakdown of society, personal confusion and disillusionment, and the lost-ness of humanity.

In these times, the hearts and minds of whole generations of young people are being distorted and twisted by this notion of relativism, and the end result is total disconnection from reality; and especially God’s reality.

As the apostle John wrote in John 1:5; ‘*...the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.*’

There are those for whom the light of God’s truth is unknowable, because their spiritual blindness is so complete. There are, however, those for whom there is yet hope and new life.

On that day, on the road to Damascus, Paul discovered that his blindness was not yet beyond redemption. On that day, he received a commission from the Lord Jesus himself to take the message of the gospel to the gentile peoples:

‘.. *I now send you, **to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light**, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.*’ (Acts 26:17-18)

With a transformed life, Paul went throughout the eastern parts of the Roman Empire sharing what the Lord had done for him. The light of God’s truth not only overcame Paul’s blindness, but also the blindness of so many others.

Today, this commission has not been revoked.

We have also been called to take the light of God’s truth to those who have been blinded to the truth.

We do this, not by force or persuasive argument, but by simple proclamation, a genuine life witness of truth and love, and an utter dependence upon the leading and directing of God’s Holy Spirit.

May His name be praised: **He is** the Light of the world.