

Back in 1991, there was an article in THE NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE concerning a group of more than 100 women who reside in Long Beach, California. These women, Cambodian refugees who witnessed the horror of the Pol Pot Regime, are certifiably blind even though doctors say their eyes function perfectly well. These sightless women suffer from psychosomatic or hysterical blindness. **They are really blind, but their blindness stems from their minds.**

Psychosomatic disorders are nothing new. We know that the state of our mind can affect our speech, our hearing and our memory as well as our sight. Scientists really do not understand this phenomenon, only *that it shows the power of the mind over the body*. One researcher attempted to explain the refugees' disorder as follows: "Losing eyesight makes sense if you are trying to escape the stress of a situation . . . *At the movie theater you don't cover your ears when grotesque violence comes on the screen. You'll always cover your eyes.*"

These women have eyes that function normally--still they cannot see. Hold that thought in your mind for a moment. We will come back to it.

Have you heard of a phenomenon called "BLINDSIGHT?" Studies show that certain blind people "*sightless as the result of stroke or brain injury, rather than damage to the eye*" can do a remarkable thing. If an object is put in front of them and if they are asked to reach for the object, they will say it is impossible, since they cannot see it. But if they can be persuaded to TRY, they will find the object with a sureness that amazes even themselves.

This uncanny ability is called "blindsight." *It turns out these people theoretically have superb vision, but they don't know they can see*, according to Anthony Marcel, a psychologist at Cambridge University who has done research on blindsight. The brain damage that has rendered these patients blind is not in those areas that have to do with seeing per se. **Technically their vision is fine.** What their eye sees, however, is never transmitted to the part of the brain that brings vision into awareness. **They can see--they just don't know it.**

THEY HAVE EYES BUT ARE UNABLE TO SEE!! The women from Cambodia were sightless because their minds had subconsciously closed out horrific images they did not want to see. Those having blindsight also have healthy eyes, but because of damage to other parts of their neurological system they are not aware of the images their eyes are transmitting.

Our lesson from John's Gospel is about a man who was SIGHTLESS. As far as we know, people in Bible times knew nothing about psychosomatic illness nor did they know about neurological damage. **Their explanation for any form of suffering was that someone must have sinned.** **"Who sinned,"** the disciples asked Jesus, **"that this man was born sightless?"**

"No one sinned," Jesus assured them. ***It would be easy to pass the sightless man by, wouldn't it, if he were in his situation because of sin? It's much easier to ignore people's misery if they are there because of their own bad choices.*** Jesus would have none of that.

LET'S BEGIN BY NOTING THAT JESUS SAW THIS BLIND MAN. This is an important point. TODAY WE ARE TALKING ABOUT "SEEING" AND JESUS "SAW" THE BLIND MAN. I can guarantee you that other people passed this man every day and never saw him. They never tried to help him or even to relate to him. **They acted like he wasn't even there.**

Isn't that the way it is when someone has a handicapped condition of any sort or is different from us in some way? Don't we shy away OR try to pass on by quickly? Not out of any kind of ill feelings but simply because we don't know how to react. We're afraid we will say the wrong thing.

I enjoyed reading about a luncheon visit Joni Eareckson Tada had with a group of inner-city pastors from Chicago. As many of you know, Joni was left paralyzed many years ago from a diving accident. As she talked about disability ministry with these inner-city pastors, she couldn't help wondering, ***"Now am I supposed to say African-American?"*** Or would they prefer black?' Hmmm . . .it's OK," she thought, "to say people of color." Joni thought about her husband, Ken, who is of Japanese descent. His mother prefers the word "oriental" while he prefers "Asian," but his dad liked the term "Japanese-American."

Joni continued talking to the pastors about the subject of disabilities. The subject of color didn't come up. Later on when the subject of Hispanic churches was discussed, Joni says she got a tad tongue-tied between the words "Hispanic" and "Latino." **She decided then to ask the pastors how they wished to be referred to, whether as "black" or "African-American."**

To her surprise, they slapped the table and laughed out loud. The pastors had been wrestling with some questions of their own. During lunch, they had watched Joni being fed a sandwich by her friend. They wondered, "Now when we refer to her, are we supposed to say handicapped?" Or physically challenged?' I know we're not supposed to refer to her as a cripple or an invalid. But which is it?"

One of the pastors said, "We were itching to know all during lunch how you wanted to be called . . . all those fancy terms ... we didn't want to say the wrong thing and were wondering what was right!" **Together, Joni and these pastors had a good laugh over their mutual awkwardness.**

Will we ever come to the point when we see other people simply as human beings? Will we ever come to the point when we look beyond our differences and see each other as children of God?

WE WILL IF WE START BY "SEEING ONE ANOTHER." YES, #1, Jesus SAW the blind man. That's the first thing we need to see. He did not try to hurry by him or ignore him. He did not see him as somehow different or unworthy. He saw him as a precious human soul. Jesus saw the man.

BUT THE 2ND THING WE CAN TAKE AWAY FROM THIS STORY IS, JESUS HEALED HIM. Let's not miss that. Jesus healed him. What a great gift Jesus bestowed upon this sightless man. He healed him.

James L. Kraft, a renowned Christian layman, recalls as a great turning point in his life the day that a certain kindly eye doctor came into his life. James was a fourteen-year-old boy, one of a family of eleven children, living on a farm in Canada. In his book, ADVENTURE IN JADE, he relates that he had never been able to distinguish objects clearly. ***His nearsightedness was so acute and so distressing that he assumed everyone on earth suffered continuously from furious headaches, and that all the earth had the blurry image of a boat seen from under water.***

But one summer an eye doctor from the city was vacationing in the vicinity, and young James was taking care of the doctor's horse and buggy. Noting his extreme nearsightedness, the eye doctor insisted that James go to the city with him to be fitted with a pair of glasses. In that gift of glasses, Kraft gratefully recalls, ***"he gave me the earth and all that was in it, completely in focus and beautiful beyond anything I could have dreamed . . . I cannot think of another act of human kindness,"*** Kraft concludes, ***"in my lifetime which can compare with his."***

The blind man that Jesus healed would undoubtedly give the same kind of testimony. In fact, when he discovered it was Jesus who had healed him, he bowed before him and worshiped him. **It's a wonderful thing to be healed by Jesus whatever your need might be.**

There are all kinds of healing. Jesus HEALED the blind man. How easily we forget that. Many good people--church people who have been baptized and professed their faith in Jesus Christ--carry around a burden of pain that could be lifted if only they would take seriously the idea that Jesus does heal. ***He healed people then and he heals people now. He can heal us whatever our need might be.***

SO, THIS BRINGS US TO OUR 3RD POINT. Jesus saw the blind man. Jesus healed the blind man. AND JESUS WANTS TO HEAL BOTH YOU AND ME.

That's the final thing that we need to see. Jesus wants to heal US. But you say, ***"Pastor, I don't need healing. My relationship with my spouse is just fine. My health is just fine. I'm not in any kind of pain right now. I don't need Jesus' healing."***

Maybe not, but we don't want to miss the central teaching of this chapter of John's Gospel.

The central teaching of this chapter is that losing your sight is a tragic thing, ***but far more tragic is having healthy eyes and being SPIRITUALLY SIGHTLESS.*** If we took time to go through this entire chapter of John, we would see that it is a play upon the twin themes of physical blindness and spiritual blindness.

In fact, the chapter ends with Jesus' opponents, the religious authorities, asking, **"Are we blind?"**

AND THE ANSWER IS YES. In fact, this is where MOST people are.

THEY ARE “SPIRITUALLY BLIND.” *They don't really SEE their family members, *they don't really SEE their neighbors, *they don't really SEE the sightless man on the street, and most of all, *they don't see God. *They have eyes and yet are blind. Are you in that category? Am I?*

During the Christmas season of 1879, a newspaper reporter in Boston saw three little girls standing in front of a store window full of toys. One of them was blind.

Coming closer, he heard the other two trying to describe the playthings to their friend. **He said he had never thought of how difficult it would be to explain what something looks like to someone who has never been able to see.** *That incident became the basis for a newspaper story.*

Two weeks later this same reporter attended a meeting conducted by Dwight L. Moody. His purpose was to catch the great evangelist in some inconsistency and expose him. **He was greatly surprised, therefore, when Moody used the reporter's own newspaper account of the three children to illustrate a spiritual truth.**

"Just as the blind girl couldn't visualize the toys," said Moody, "so an unsaved person can't see Christ in all His glory." He said that God opens the eyes of anyone who acknowledges his sin and accepts the Savior in humble faith.

The newsman was touched by Moody's words and saw that he too was blind and in need of Christ's healing touch.

It's a good word for us to consider. **Are we seeing life in all its richness or is there a blind spot in our lives?** There is only one Doctor who can heal spiritual blindness. **THAT IS CHRIST HIMSELF!!**

Dr. Sam Lawton was born blind. Nevertheless, he had a ministry in Spartanburg, S.C. Years before his death, he traveled to the Holy Land. His group was following the steps of Jesus in His ministry. Approaching Jericho, the guide told them, ***"Right over there is the rock where Bartimaeus first met Jesus and was healed of his blindness."*** Dr. Lawton asked his friend, ***"Take me over to that rock."*** The whole crowd was hushed in silence as Dr. Lawton stood on that site and began to sing a little song that goes like this: ***"The whole world was lost in the darkness of sin, the Light of the world is Jesus. Like sunshine at noonday His glory shone in, the Light of the world is Jesus."*** And by this time I am told that this dear man's face radiated with great joy as he concluded: ***"Once I was blind, but now I can see, the Light of the world is Jesus."***

Jesus helps people to see. He helps people see their families and friends in new way. Jesus helps people see opportunities for improving their lives. Jesus makes it possible for people to see God. He can help you and me see things we never saw before. **Jesus SAW the blind man. Jesus HEALED the blind man, and YES, Jesus can HEAL BOTH YOU & ME from our blindness as well. THE QUESTION IS...." WILL YOU LET HIM?"**

Amen.