

Sermon- The Illogic of Unbelief

Scripture: John 9: 17-34

Sunday, November 4, 2018

So far in the healing of the man born blind, Jesus prepares his disciples for a big teaching moment and then he does a big healing for our suffering friend. It is a healing that changes his life dramatically. Then all the neighbors have their heads spinning when they find out and finally the impact of his healing escalates to issues of Sabbath Law and that is when the Pharisees are brought into the scene. We have already gone through so much with this man starting on Sept 9th. Today I will be preaching my fifth sermon on him so I think I can call this man a friend, don't you think?

Well, today we are going to get into this incredible back and forth between the Pharisees who are the highest religious elites of the land and someone who was just a beggar till he had his Jesus encounter. Post encounter our friend has boundless confidence to tackle something as challenging as the theological foolishness of the religious experts. And as our friend pushes back at the Pharisees, the Pharisees get exposed. Today, we are going to look at the hilariously ridiculous logic of the Pharisees.

First, I want to take you through the flow of these 17 verses. We begin in verse 17 with the Pharisees putting our friend in a strange situation. They ask our friend for his opinion on the person who healed him. Now the very fact that they were asking for his opinion is ridiculous because the Pharisees never really cared about anybody's opinion but their own. But the fact is that they think they can manipulate the situation and our friend to their advantage so they ask him what his opinion is. Now our friend thinks about what Jesus has done, thinks back and stories he has heard from the Bible, logically connects the dots in his mind, and concludes that Jesus must be a prophet.

Now this response did not sit well with the Pharisees because they were hoping I guess that our friend would say something that could be used against Jesus and not elevate him by any method. But I don't really know what they were expecting to hear from our friend who had experienced a healing like never before. Think about this. If you had some terrible disease, maybe stage 4 cancer and you went to a doctor who managed to heal you completely and people asked you for your opinion on this doctor what do you think it would be? If there was a rating system from one to 5 stars like on Amazon, then you would rate this doctor a 5 maybe? But when our friend gives his healer a 5 star rating the Pharisees get mad. Totally inconvenient, but what did they expect when they asked the guy who was healed to rate his healer? Anyway that did not work so what do we do now? Verse 18 is interesting. It says, ¹⁸ *The Jewish leaders still refused to believe the man had been blind and could now see, so they called in his parents.*

See basically verse 18 shows that this was not an unbiased investigation. They did not get the answers they were looking for from our friend so plan B, let's see if we can get it from the parents.

So the parents are brought out. The Pharisees ask them three questions. Is this your son? Was he born blind? If he was how is it that he can see now? Now hear the Pharisees are hoping the parents will be intimidated enough to say something that the Pharisees can hold on to. But the parents prove to be more shrewd than the Pharisees here because they smartly wriggle out of either declaring a miracle had happened or telling a lie that their son was not actually blind or something. They tell the Pharisees, "you ask our son what happened, he is old enough to speak for himself".

The Pharisees now are outmaneuvered and can do nothing but call our friend back. But what can they ask him now to get him to answer in a way that will help their objective? This part actually is really funny, because in their minds they are trying to search for a strategy to meet their goals but they are thinking so hard that instead of a strategic

move their goals tumble out of their mouths instead. See they are Pharisees so they want to show that God is being glorified, but they also want to prove that Jesus is a sinner. Notice that they exposed their goals before they could formulate their question. Now when our friend hears their goals about accusing Jesus as a sinner, he tells the Pharisees, “I don’t know if this man is a sinner or not. What I do know is that I was blind, now I see and this man Jesus was the one who healed me”. To our friend, what he personally experienced from Jesus was Jesus’ incredible power. The Pharisees of course are so biased against Jesus that they are unable to associate Jesus with such incredible power from God, so they are stuck on the “but how” question. “But how did Jesus do it”. This is like in our previously example, you are completely cancer free after being treated by Dr Amazing and I asked you what treatments did he make you do and you described everything to me. And after hearing everything I ask you, “but how did Dr Amazing cure you?” If I keep asking “but how” questions there are only two possibilities. Either I am trying to learn to become an oncologist myself by asking cancer patients questions or I have gone loco, right? That is the position our friend was in. The Pharisees kept asking him but how, but how and but how. And our friend turns the tables on the Pharisees and asks them, “why are you repeating your but how questions. Do you want to become a disciple of Jesus?” That is where we are in verse 27.

When the Pharisees hear this, they get incensed and so they decide to throw rank at our friend by telling him, “We are disciples of Moses, we know God spoke to Moses, But we don’t know where this man Jesus comes from”. In other words they were saying to our friend, we know our theology. We are disciples of the greatest prophet who ever lived. But this man is, Jesus who? The Pharisees wanted to intimidate our friend by flashing their credentials and diminish Jesus as a nobody.

But even this intimidation tactic blows up in their face. Because instead of our friend being impressed by the Pharisees’ God connections, what our man notices is that these so called God experts don’t know anything about a person who just demonstrated the

incredible power of God. That is like saying, the most spectacular cure for cancer has been discovered and the reporters run to the President of the Medical Association, Dr Know It All and at the Press conference after being introduced as the President of the Medical Association, our doctor steps up to the podium and says, " good evening ladies and gentlemen. Now what happened in the field of cancer?" Now if you were sitting there listening to this guy you would not be very impressed right? That is what happens here. The more the Pharisees boast about their credentials with God, the more ignorant they look when they dismiss the man Jesus who had just demonstrated God's power in a way that had never been seen in the history of Israel.

So how does this conversation end? In the only way that a conversation that exposes the Pharisees as a bunch of ignorant fools can end, they become red in the face, accuse our friend of being a "total sinner" and throw him out of the synagogue.

It is sad for our friend at this point in the story but don't be too worried for our friend. He will do fine in the end. What I want to do now is just pause for a minute and change tone by examining a larger question, "how do you know anything?" What process do you follow in your life to come to the certainty about the knowledge that you have? Well, here is the process that we should follow and even our friend who is healed follows this process. It is very simple. Step one, examine the evidence and gather the information. Think of this as finding different dots on the page that you are going to create your image on. Step two. You apply your Reason. Reason helps you figure out how the dots are connected. When you have all your dots connected, you have your conclusion.

Now I want to mention that this process I described for you can be used for most things in our world. When it comes to things of God there is a little bit of the difference. You see because God is infinite, you cannot get to God simply by reasoning with our finite minds. So how do we come to conclusions about matters relating to the things of God?

Well, remember in 1 Peter 3:15 it says, “Always be prepared to give a reason for the hope that you have”. That means reason is still very much involved even in the things of God. But it works like this. First we gather the evidence. We read, we study, we talk to people who have some personal experience in matters of God. So step one is the same as above, we gather the evidence. Then we use our reason to connect the dots. Some dots will connect. But here is where the situation is a little different. Because we are dealing with God who is infinite, even if we connect all the dots we will not get a complete picture. What we will get is something like a airplane runway. Our own reason can take us only so far but beyond that all our reason can do is point to something in a higher dimension. This is the mystery of God. There is a higher reality and that higher reality we can only receive into our finite minds by faith. This is the relationship between faith and reason. And in fact this is the very process our friend had followed. He examined the evidence, he connected the dots and it lead him to the mystery of God. He knew that what had happened to him was a demonstration of God’s power that had not been seen from the beginning of time. This my friends is the logic of faith.

But my sermon title is about the opposite, the illogic of unbelief. That is because I want to contrast for you the process of unbelief because our passage today so clearly shows us this process. So the unbelief process goes like this. It starts in the same place, with the examination of evidence. But now some dots begin to look very inconvenient to a preconceived imagine in the mind of the unbeliever. So the next step is to erase some of the inconvenient dots. Of the dots that they are willing to consider, they make some arbitrary connections to make the dots show an image they want to see. Now they look at the image that is forming with their convenient dots and arbitrary interconnections and then they take that arbitrary image and use it to make a firm conclusion. This my friends is the illogical process of unbelief.

I want to offer a caveat here. I don't want to belittle those people who are genuinely still in the process of examining the evidence. This process takes years and it took years for me. You have to be extremely patient with the spiritual journey of those around you.

But today's scripture has three implications for you and me. The first is that you will come across people who have worldly credentials, who belittle things of faith and try to intimidate you into believing their conclusions just because they are somebody in the eyes of the world. When you are in the presence of such people, I want you to know that you don't have any reason to be intimidated. Like our friend who was a beggar with no standing in society, once he was healed by Jesus he was ready to stand up to the biggest religious scholars of his day. Nobody could throw our friend off his game and nobody should be able to throw you off your game either.

The second implication is that when someone you are talking to is not willing to see reason or make reasonable conclusions, then reasoning is not going to work with them. You are wasting your time. Now I am not saying give up on them either. It might be possible to try a different approach by recognizing the emotions behind their statements and trying to work with that. Our passage today does not go into the details of that approach and so I am not going to go there today. But I just want to say this. Don't waste your time trying to reason with someone who is not being reasonable.

The third thing I want to say to people who are stuck in their unbelief is that sometimes there comes a moment when you have to shake the dust of your sandals and move on. This is what the disciples were told to do when they were sent to share the Gospel. The reason you may need to move on is not that we are giving up on those people. It may be that this is not the time for them to be able to see the truth. It may also be that you are not the right person who can help them see the truth. It may be that they are not from God but that is not for us to judge. That is God's problem and not ours. There could be all kinds of reasons but the bottom line is, in some cases when you are stuck with a

person showing persistent unbelief, it might be that it is time for you to shake your sandals and move on.

When you go about your day and encounter people who don't believe, don't be intimidated by them, try different approaches besides reasoning if you can. But don't be afraid to ask God if the time has come for you to move on as well. But don't ever let anyone tell you that just because you believe something by faith that you are not using your reason. No friends it is Unbelief that is an unreasonable process. Faith on the other hand takes us to the highest reaches of reason. May we grow in both our reason and our faith and take many people with us into the mysteries of God. Let us pray.