

JJ¹

I know it's March and nobody wants to go back to December, but did anybody open a Christmas gift this year and find that not only was the gift re-gifted, but it was the very gift you gave to that person the year before? Glad it didn't happen to you, though I hear it's happened before. Gifts can tell you a lot about the giver. Now of course it also depends on the relationship and situation between people, but still, gifts tell a lot about the giver. If someone re-gifts a gift they received from someone else and gives it to you, it might mean they're ungrateful and cheap. Gift cards or straight up cash might tell your loved one that you don't care to really know them or you're too lazy to think of something. To give your child only things that are on their list, might also display a lack of interest. But then there are those gifts you never saw coming. They're gifts that are unique in a good way. They're gifts given because the giver knows you, thought about what makes you, you and put love and effort into the gift.

Today we follow Jesus as his journey to the cross gets shorter and shorter. Today we find Jesus coming across a man who was doubly blind—blind physically and spiritually. This account is filled with blindness, blindness Jesus longs to remove with sight. The gifts of physical

and spiritual sight tell us a lot about Jesus. Today we see that **GIFTS ILLUMINATE THE GIVER.**

As Jesus was passing by, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Already we're confronted with all sorts of blindness. The physical blindness of the beggar reveals some spiritual blindness in Jesus' disciples. While certain sins can result in physical consequences, the disciples were blinded by the devil's lie which says God punishes people with all kinds ailments for various sins. That thinking was very prevalent because that is what the Pharisees taught. Sometimes we think the same way too: "What did I do to deserve this?" Others describe it as karma. Either way, it doesn't line up with the light of truth.

Jesus quickly illuminates their spiritual blindness with the truth: "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that God's works might be revealed in connection with him." This was all part of God's amazing plan that he set in motion from the beginning of time. With all the awful ailments and diseases that afflict this world because we live in a sinful and decaying world, it's shocking to hear that God's plan was to withhold the gift of

¹ JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

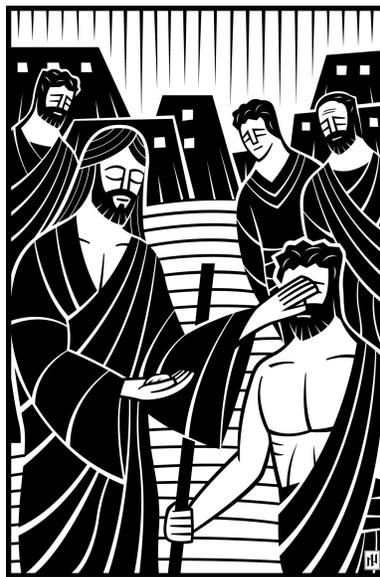
sight from birth until this day. All so that God would be revealed, not just to this blind man, but all the more to the disciples, and even to all the generations who would follow and read this account, you and me included!

“I must do the works of him who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the Light of the World.” After saying this, Jesus spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and spread the mud on the man’s eyes. “Go,” Jesus told him, “wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means “Sent”). So he went and washed, and came back seeing.

His neighbors and others who knew him are shocked and amazed when they see he has sight. They ask who did it, but when he doesn’t have an answer, they reveal their own blindness. Who else could do this but God? Instead of seeking out Jesus for answers, they bring him to the Pharisees. And how quickly the Pharisees reveal their own blindness! “This man is not from God because he does not keep the Sabbath.” Their view of the Sabbath had become so perverted that they imagined that man was made for the Sabbath, not the Sabbath for man. Other Pharisees seem to be less blind, at first. They’re the

ones who argue, “How can a sinful man work such miraculous signs?”

Finally, their true colors are revealed—the fullness of their blindness is out in the open. “...they said to the blind man again, ‘What do you say about him, because he opened your eyes?’ The man replied, ‘He is a prophet.’ They answered him, ‘You were entirely born in sinfulness! Yet you presume to teach us?’ And they threw him out.”



You see, friends, GIFTS ILLUMINATE THE GIVER. But as we see, earthly gifts, even miracles, only go so far. Earthly gifts give testimony to the Giver, but don’t show us who he truly is. Earthly gifts, even physical sight given to a man blind from birth, tell us the Giver is powerful, wise and loving. Yet they fail to illuminate/reveal the Giver in the most important and essential way—that he is the Light of

the World.

Earthly gifts will produce one of two reactions. 1) shock, amazement and even joy, but not faith; or, 2) anger, resentment and rejection.

The second reaction, that of the Pharisees, is a bit easier to understand, even though it is shocking. The Pharisees’ hardened hearts of unbelief reveal the truth they speak, though refuse to apply to them-

selves—that we all are “entirely born in sinfulness.” The unbelieving heart rejects God outright, his works and his followers.

But it’s the first reaction which more easily hides in our hearts. The reaction of the man and his neighbors reveals the spiritual blindness that you and I still carry with us. Notice how the man and his neighbors are looking for opinions instead of seeking out the Giver himself to explain everything to them. How often don’t we also waste time considering our own opinion or the opinion of others instead of just going to the source, going to God’s Word to hear God explain himself!

In the end, the man can only say Jesus was a prophet, and is ready to go on with his life, not seeking out Jesus. They got so caught up in the gift, that the Giver really wasn’t all that important. How easy it is for us to fall into this trap too! All the physical and earthly gifts God gives us are given because he chooses to bless us. But how easy it is for us to become enamored with the gift that we forget all about the Giver. We reveal this with how little we thank God for the gifts he’s given, but are certainly quick to complain when they are taken away.

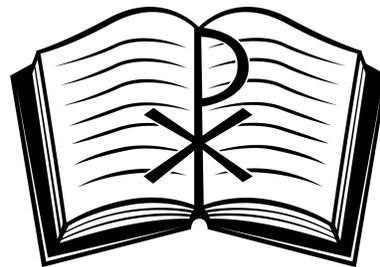
This is why Jesus must seek us out, just like he sought the man he healed. He must seek us out so that he can give us the greatest gift of all which illuminates

him as the greatest Giver there ever was or will be.

Jesus heard that [the Pharisees] had thrown him out. When he found him, he asked, “Do you believe in the Son of God?” “Who is he, sir,” the man replied, “that I may believe in him?” Jesus answered, “You have seen him, and he is the very one who is speaking with you.” Then he said, “Lord, I believe!” and he knelt down and worshipped him.

Jesus breaks down the door of spiritual darkness and unbelief. The gift of faith illuminates Jesus as the perfect Giver and the Light of the World. Yes, the Light of the World would be snuffed out by the powers of darkness as strange darkness covered the earth and as God the Father turned his back on his own Son. Yet the Light of the World burst forth from the tomb after three days with brilliant victorious glory! And that’s what makes Christ the perfect and greatest Giver—he gives himself.

Our Lord Jesus Christ did not just give us something that someone else gave him and he didn’t want. Jesus didn’t just mindlessly give us a spiritual gift card so we could shop for our own spiritual sight. Jesus didn’t just look at our list to see what we thought we needed. No, our Lord Jesus took the time to know us, to know exactly what we needed. How well does he know us? Well, friends, he didn’t



just phone it in from the glories of heaven. He came here to be with us—to live with us—to share our sorrow—to share our pain—to share our temptations—to die what should have been our death! He did all this so that we could see, so we could see him as the very Son of God and shout out in joy all our lives, “Lord, I believe!” and worship him.

That’s a huge part of our response to having our eyes opened to the Giver, the Light of the World. We worship and praise him, just as we are doing now. But friends, please realize that your worship and praise of your Lord isn’t confined to the walls of this sanctuary. You worship and praise your Lord in your homes, where you work, at school, and where you play and shop as you honor him with lives that reflect his love. That’s part of Jesus’ point when he said it was necessary to work while it is day. Jesus gives us his light and directs us to let that light shine in the world. Each of us has time and opportunities, but they’re all limited, either by our own time here on earth or by the time of those trapped in darkness. That’s why the time is now. Now is the time to go and shine the light of Jesus’ Word in the hearts of others—showing them their sin through the law, and showing them their Savior in the gospel.

Friends, although earthly gifts, even miracles, don’t illuminate the Savior to us in the most excellent way, he still blesses us with them. What’s more is that The Giver seeks us out and won’t stop until he finds us so that he can give us the greatest gift there is to give—faith. The Light of the World, the Son of Man, the Son of God chases down the darkness to shine the light of love and forgiveness into the blind hearts of spiritual darkness, our hearts, all that we would live in his light forever! Amen.

SDG²

² SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for “To God Alone Be The Glory”. This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn’t about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.

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