

BLIND, DEAF AND SAVED!

“For a long time I have kept silent, I have been quiet and held myself back. But now, like a woman in childbirth, I cry out, I gasp and pant. I will lay waste the mountains and hills and dry up all their vegetation; I will turn rivers into islands and dry up the pools. I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them. But those who trust in idols, who say to images, ‘You are our gods,’ will be turned back in utter shame. “Hear, you deaf; look, you blind, and see! Who is blind but my servant, and deaf like the messenger I send? Who is blind like the one committed to me, blind like the servant of the LORD? You have seen many things, but have paid no attention; your ears are open, but you hear nothing.” It pleased the LORD for the sake of his righteousness to make his law great and glorious.”

Helen Keller at first was a normal child. Then at age one and a half, in December of 1881, she became blind and deaf. They weren't sure what caused it, whether it was scarlet fever or meningitis. Though she learned a few words in sign language, it wasn't enough. Mom and dad were desperately seeking help for their daughter. They traveled to Baltimore to see a specialist. The specialist directed them to Alexander Graham Bell who at the time was working with deaf children. He told them to go to South Boston to an institute for the blind. It was there that they met a twenty year old, partially blind lady named Annie Sullivan who agreed to help.

By this time, Helen was not only blind and deaf, she was hard to control. Undoubtedly she was frustrated by her disabilities. But people felt sorry for her, so they gave her whatever she wanted. Each day it got worse and worse. Bad habits formed and she was an out of control, spoiled, deaf and blind child. Anne Sullivan made the parents agree to her conditions. She would not help unless they allowed her to isolate Helen in a small house on their property. It was an extremely difficult job. Helen and Anne fought. Eventually Helen became disciplined, learned to communicate and would eventually earn a college degree and write several books.

Friends, this Lent we focus on our sins and what God did to save us from them. We like to think that we were these poor, little puppies, lost in the cold, shivering on some doorstep and the owner opens the door and says, “Aw, poor little puppy,” and takes us in. But that is not the case. No, we were more like Helen Keller, spoiled little brats who can't see God, can't hear him, and fight him tooth and nail. We were out of control. So what does God do to us? He saves us!

I. Blind unbelief.

“Hear, you deaf; look, you blind, and see!” This sounds like a cruel joke. It would be cruel to go up to a blind person and say, “Would you like to see my pictures?” But the Lord is not being cruel here. He is telling the truth. This world, and we people who live in it are by nature blind and deaf. It is like asking three blind men to describe an elephant. One would grab the elephant's tail and conclude an elephant is like a rope. One would grab the elephant's trunk and conclude an elephant is like a snake. One would touch the leg and conclude the elephant is like a tree. People are too blind and deaf to figure God out. That is why the Greeks came up with 400 different gods, why the Chinese came up with Buddhism, and many in Africa worship any living thing as a god. They are guessing.

But God reveals himself to us through his Word. He tells what he does and us who he is. He shows us Christ and the cross, the resurrection of Jesus, his many miracles, etc. But do we see? ***“Hear, you deaf; look, you blind, and see! Who is blind but my servant, and deaf like the messenger I send? Who is blind like the one committed to me, blind like the servant of the LORD? You have seen many things, but have paid no attention; your ears are open, but you hear nothing.”*** These words were first spoken to the Old Testament Israelites. By that time they had at least 27 generations of Israelites going all the way back to Abraham! How many generations of Christians have led up to you? You would think that would be an advantage to them. No one has seen the things they saw and heard the things they heard. But they were still blind. They had ears but didn't hear God.

That is why we human beings are like Helen Keller, only worse. What can be worse than to be blind and deaf? Well, spiritually blind and deaf is worse. Imagine that a deaf person can't hear the birds sing. Imagine a blind person unable to see the mountains or a forest. Imagine a spiritually deaf person never hearing that Jesus died for him! Even if the words were spoken, he would not hear. That is because we are spiritually dead and blind, unable to see or hear.

The Pharisees in Jesus' day were like that. After healing a blind man, Jesus said, ***“For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.” Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, ‘What? Are we blind, too?’ Jesus said, ‘If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.’”*** Not long after this many of these Pharisees would witness the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Did they see Jesus as the Christ? No. They plotted to kill him. That is because unbelief never sees. It never hears though it hears God's Word.

Coming to church will do you no good if you don't listen and believe. Reading a Bible will be no good if you don't listen and believe. We can recite dozens of passages from memory, but that will mean nothing if we don't listen and believe. Coming to

Communion will do you no good unless you listen and believe. That is because faith and the Word go hand in hand. And here is the irony. In order to see by faith, we must be blind and have a blind faith that trusts in God alone.

II. *Blind faith.*

“For a long time I have kept silent, I have been quiet and held myself back. But now, like a woman in childbirth, I cry out, I gasp and pant. I will lay waste the mountains and hills and dry up all their vegetation.”

All mankind is like the spoiled, deaf and blind Helen Keller. We don't understand God. We can't hear him. We fight him tooth and nail. But God is patient with us like Anne Sullivan with Helen Keller. In the Hebrew this verse has the idea of someone forcefully holding himself back. It is like biting your lip instead of saying something. But, God says, a time is coming when he will no longer hold himself back. It will be like a woman in labor. She has nine months of waiting, but once the baby comes, she can't stop it.

The contractions are going on as we speak. Remember how Jesus revealed to us the signs of the end times? There will be earthquakes like the ones in Italy and off the coast of California. There will be wars like in the Middle East. Then the day will come when God releases his anger. ***“I will lay waste the mountains and hills and dry up all their vegetation; I will turn rivers into islands and dry up the pools.”*** This sinful world will be laid to waste. It will become like some dead desert. And that includes its inhabitants. ***“Those who trust in idols, who say to images, ‘You are our gods,’ will be turned back in utter shame.”*** Sinful man will be shamed by suffering the “second death,” an eternity with the devil and his demons.

But, ***“I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them.”*** I read a book on World War One. There was a haunting picture of British soldiers blinded by mustard gas. They had these pathetic bandages over their eyes. They each reached out to hold onto the shoulder of the guy in front like a human chain of blind men, and leading them was one soldier who could see.

God promises to lead the blind to safety. Yes, it is true, the Bible often speaks of faith as the blind being able to see. But this picture here is also true. In order to be saved you must be blind. Picture believers like those WWI British shoulders, each holding the should of the soldier in front of him, but this human chain is led by a soldier who can see. We trust God. We follow him blindly even though we don't understand his ways or how he can turn things into good. Faith is the blind sinner leaning on and trusting God.

“I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth.” Some of the best money you spent was to install the elevator. Now handicapped people can access the basement, offices and church. But we are not perfect. There is no elevator to the balcony. You have steps leading up to this altar area. But God makes the way to heaven fully and perfectly handicap accessible. God will clear the way for us so nothing can trip us up. It would be like God tearing out all these steps. He would take the balcony, lift it off and put on the ground. He would make this all one easy, accessible single level building. Our sins are a huge pit to hell. But God filled it in with Jesus' death as payment for those sins. The holy requirements necessary for heaven would be like steps and huge cliffs before us, but God leveled all of them because Jesus' holiness is ours. In other words, with God leading us, it is a smooth road to heaven.

We would do well to consider ourselves blind and absolutely dependant on God. Then we can be sure of our salvation. I think the closing verses in Habakkuk captures this well. ***“Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength.”*** We do not know what the immediate future holds for us. In fact, it is rather bleak. But we do know what the long-range future is. God will deliver us. He will lead us safely through it all. We know it will happen because our blind faith holds onto the Lord and is certain of what we do not see. Trust God. INJ Amen.