

### Faith Sees!

***<sup>8</sup> The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, <sup>9</sup> “When Pharaoh tells you, ‘Perform a miracle,’ tell Aaron, ‘Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh. It will become a serpent.’” <sup>10</sup> So Moses and Aaron went in to Pharaoh and did just as the Lord had commanded. Aaron threw down his staff before Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a serpent. <sup>11</sup> But then Pharaoh called the wise men and sorcerers—the magicians of Egypt, and they also did the same thing by their occult practices. <sup>12</sup> Each one threw down his staff, and it became a serpent. But Aaron’s staff swallowed their staffs. <sup>13</sup> However, Pharaoh’s heart was hard, and he did not listen to them, as the Lord had said.***

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This is an exchange between a Christian graduate student and his unbelieving professor. The unbelieving professor said, “If you want to convince your skeptics that your god is real, why don’t you do what Elijah did in the Old Testament? Why don’t you go out in the street and stop the traffic. Why don’t you erect a huge pile of wood there and call all the skeptics to come and see. Douse the wood with hundreds of gallons of water and ask your god to consume it with fire from heaven?” The grad student responded, “Suppose I did that and God consumed it with fire. What would you say?” The professor smiled and said, “Well, I would say that there must be another explanation.”

Jesus and the true God will be rejected by most people. Why? The professor demands his empirical evidence and still finds excuses not to believe. Pharaoh in our text demanded scientific evidence, yet he hardened his heart and refused to listen. Why is it that learned men are studying the wonders of God’s creation and refuse to acknowledge what they plainly see, that God exists, yet little children stand in church singing praises to his name?

Why? Simple. Naturally we humans find excuses not to believe in God, or we want a god we can give orders to or do what we want. But when someone believes, it is a miracle. The unbeliever is blind. The believer sees so much. Let’s thank God that we believe and see. So that we may appreciate this gift, let’s first see why humans just don’t see or believe.

#### *I. Why sinful humans can’t see or believe.*

What would it take to convince Pharaoh, one, that God exists, and two, that he should listen to him? When two men over the age of 80 stepped in and told Pharaoh that he should let his two plus million slaves take three days off to worship God, I can see why Pharaoh refused. I mean, he is Pharaoh, leader of one of the superpowers at the time. Why should he obey these old men? He insisted on some empirical evidence, some proof he should listen.

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Pharaoh got it evidence. A staff turning into a snake. Even when the magicians duplicated it, Aaron’s snake devoured all of theirs. Here was proof that Pharaoh was up against God, and yet he refused to listen. After this, God sent plague after plague to convince Pharaoh he is messing with someone bigger than he is. The first plague, turning the Nile into blood, must have been something. The magicians somehow duplicated it. The plague of frogs was unnatural, yet the magicians duplicated that, too, but after that, starting with the plague of gnats, even the magicians threw their hands up on the air and admitted that this was the finger of God, yet they and Pharaoh refused to listen to God.

Why is it so hard to believe? Well, the devil is trying to deceive us. I don’t know how the magicians in our text turned their staves into snakes. Could this be some magic trick, a sleight of hand thing? Certainly. Could it be a supernatural power from the devil himself? That is possible, too. The Bible attributes false signs and miracles to the devil. Whether he caused this to happen or not, the devil will try to deceive us. He also likes to contradict God like he did in the garden of evil.

But the devil is not the only one to blame. We are to blame. Go to our gospel reading. Jesus just told the people that he is the only way to God and heaven, and then asked this question, ***“Does this offend you?”*** And they were offended. If you spent hours making an angel food cake from scratch by separating the egg whites and all that, and I took a bite and said, “Not as good as store bought,” you would be offended. The Lord tells us that the only way to him and heaven is through Jesus Christ. That might offend us. We truly like to think there is something special about us. We work hard at being better than a lot of people we know. We expect a compliment. We go to God and say, “What do you think?” “Not as good as Christ,” he says. Isaiah got it. He knew that even his most righteous acts before God were like filthy rags. Baking an angel food cake with a pan I just used to change the oil in my car will be affected by that pan. Everything I touch has sin attached.

In fact, much of what God says is offensive. Jesus says he is God, yet many will not acknowledge him as God. How about Jesus' saying his body and blood is with the bread and wine, or that Baptism saves and is a washing away of sins? God calls many things sin. What part of the Bible offends you? Why?

Why is that? Jesus answered that in our gospel reading, ***"The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing."*** We are absolutely worthless when it comes to seeing and accepting and believing anything God says. Paul emphasized that when he wrote in Corinthians, ***"The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are FOOLISHNESS to him and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned."*** Pharaoh is an example of that. He shows that we have the capability to resist God, and we are pretty good at it. It says that Pharaoh hardened his heart. Read Exodus chapters 5-10 and how many times Pharaoh hardened his heart. Yes, a couple times he admitted God was superior, but the next morning he went right back at resisting him.

## *II. God gives us faith to see.*

But not the believer. Not you or me. Once Jesus saw a man blind from birth. He miraculously healed him. When the Pharisees heard of it, they brought the man before them and questioned him extensively. The formerly blind man had no real answers. He could only say, ***"One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"*** You and I say the same thing. We were once blind, but now we see. Remember, the man without the Spirit does not accept the things of God. We were no different. We would never accept what the Bible says or acknowledge Jesus as Lord. Even if fantastic miracles were performed before our very eyes, we would look for some other explanation.

But God has changed us through his Holy Spirit. It is by the Spirit that we believe and accept these things. Faith sees where unbelief is blind. At Christmas the world sees a cute baby born into an impoverished family and they feel sad he had no place to sleep. But the eyes of faith see God humbling himself and becoming one just like us. The world watches the events of Good Friday and laments how unjust society can be. But we see God who had no sin becoming sin for us. The world hears him cry out, "It is finished," and wonders what that means, but we hear it and are relieved because every sinful thought, word or deed has been wiped away forever.

The world views the events of Easter with confusion. They don't know what to make of the resurrection. But we see Jesus destroying the last enemy, death, and we see the bodies of all believers rising to eternal life on the heels of Jesus. The world looks at the world in wonder, studying it, trying to figure it out, while the whole time blind to the fact that creation is proof God exists. It is like an art student viewing the Mona Lisa in a gallery wondering who painted it. But we see God's power and wisdom in the wonders of creation. The world sees people in nursing homes or group homes as cripples, but we see people wonderfully created by God.

The world sees corruption, crime, disease, wars and hatred and tries to find ways to solve them. We see them, too, and want to help. It was Christians who started all the hospitals and charities I know of. But we also see that the root cause of every problem is sin. So we want to address that problem. We want to show them their Savior who died for their sins.

Our tools are not the government or laws or force, but the Word, the Gospel in the Bible and in the Sacraments. That is because God makes us alive in Christ through his Word. Faith is a gift of God. Sadly, not everyone will believe. Pharaoh never believed even when he saw God's power in those plagues. Judas was an unbeliever even though he sat at the feet of Jesus. But by the grace of God alone, some believe and see and are saved.

This is why we want to stay in the Word, especially knowing that the devil is trying to deceive us. This is why we are excited that Sunday School, our Lutheran school and the extra Bible classes and Catechism begin again.

Thank God you believe. The world is and always will be looking for explanations. We know the answer already. The answer is Jesus Christ. INJ Amen.