



Saul blinded in Conversion on the Damascus Road
by Caravaggio

I like the way certain words sound when they roll out of my head. One word which captivates me is “inexorable.” It sounds wonderfully schooled and rather elegant. It’s of Latin origin, and means something the course of which cannot be altered. John 9 is an intriguing view of how inexorable is the righteousness of God’s word. It’s full of both insight and humor, and starts with a question concerning the reason for a man’s blindness. Jesus says the blindness of this man has occurred so that “the work of God might be displayed in his life.” (Jn.9:3b) It has become increasingly apparent to me that the reason for so many of the challenges we face is so that God’s name may be glorified – so that God might prove to all how inexorable is his word and will for us. This actually corresponds well with a verse from the psalm we heard earlier, when the pen of David writes, “The Lord restores my soul and guides me in paths of righteousness **for his name’s sake.**” (Ps.23:3) The outcome of our walk in righteousness is that God’s name be glorified and his will accomplished. To dwell in the center of God’s will and walk with him in righteousness is to be truly blessed.

In John 9 verse 5, Jesus points out how “as long it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me.” This is a collective responsibility which we all share with The Lord, while he is “the light of the world.” (Jn.9:5) In fact elsewhere in Scripture, Jesus assures us that we believers “are the light of the world.” (See Mt.5:14) So we actually participate in the salvation of God’s elect by reflecting the light of Christ into the darkness of our present days. We must be in the world. We must be the light of the world. We cannot separate ourselves from those who walk in darkness. This corresponds well with the passage from Ephesians 5 that we heard.

From Paul’s writing, it is clear that while we must have nothing to do with the deeds of darkness (Eph.5:11), none-the-less we cannot assist Jesus in shining his light unless we are willing to take His light into the darkness and expose the dangers that lurk there it by shining God-light upon them. (Eph. 5:12-14) How else will evil be revealed for what it truly is, if God’s people are not willing to take Christ’s light into the darkness of these days? So, you see, the church is not so much a fortress as a beacon.

In John 9:7, the blind man obeyed Jesus and went and washed the spit and mud from his eyes. How different is his response from another who was instructed to go and wash. In 2nd Kings Chapter 5, we meet Naaman, the leader of the Aramaean army who has contracted Leprosy. When Elisha instructs Naaman to go wash in the Jordan River, at first he is pridefully arrogant to be instructed to perform such nonsense. You see, Naaman has to be cured of his pride as well as his skin disease. The Old Testament and Gospel passages we heard this morning illustrate how essential it is for God’s will to be combined with man’s obedience if this world is to be saved. In today’s Old Testament lesson, Samuel was obedient and God’s will was done. Jesse was obedient and God’s will was done. This nameless blind man of John’s Gospel was obedient, and God’s will was done. Even Naaman was eventually humbled and obedient and God’s will was done. Only God can save his children. But he cannot do so without our obedience. We are saved by grace through faith. But we are called to obedience. And if one is disobedient, can it be said that he was ever truly saved?

The entire chapter of John 9 is about the light of God’s judgment of righteousness and how inexorable it is. It is a mistake to think the focus of this chapter is the man who was healed. The real focus is on what happens to everyone else.

God's light of righteous judgment begins to break in v. 16, when the more honest of the Pharisees question how Jesus could be a sinner and yet perform such marvelous healing wonders. These teachers of the law become divided as to who this Jesus is. Here we begin to see the fulfillment of what Jesus talks about in places like Luke Chapter 12 when he says, "I came not to bring peace but rather division." (Lk.12:51)

Verses 18 through 23 continue to reveal the light of God's righteous judgment when the formerly blind man's parents tell the Pharisees to let their son speak for himself. We read that they were afraid to acknowledge Jesus because they might be thrown out of the synagogue. (See Jn.9:22) So, here the light of God's righteousness reveals to us that this mother and father cared more about their membership in the country club than they do about their own flesh and blood.

Next the light of God's righteous judgement falls once again on the Pharisees in verses 26-34. The man who has received his sight innocently asks them, "Do you wish to become his Disciples too?" You can imagine their plight at this point, since they were the ones who established the rule that anyone who became a disciple would be banished from the Synagogue. And the *coup-de grace* happens when the man presents them with truth based on their own beliefs. When he says in verse 31, "We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will," the man who was made whole is actually reminding the Pharisees of their own position, repeated throughout the Old Testament. In numerous passages like Pslam 34:15,16 the Holy Scriptures of the Pharisees themselves proclaimed that while the Lord is "attentive to the calls of the righteous, the face of the Lord is set against those who do evil." So, since Jesus is performing miracles possible only for the truly righteous in the eyes of God, these hypocrites are actually revealed as the bigots they are by their very own teachings. We are reminded of what God tells us when he says, "My Word will not return to me empty." (Is.55:11) So, these hypocrites resort to the only strategy they have left which is angry bluster. "How dare you lecture us," they cry. Well, somebody needs to! Because with their angry responses, these Pharisees are clearly backlit for the prideful, manipulative men they are.

When this man who has been given his sight comes to worship Jesus, Our Lord proclaims in verse 39, "For judgement I have come into this world so that that the blind will see, and those who see will become blind." He is telling us here that the Son of God came down from heaven to bring judgment so that the blind can see - so that we might be saved by grace in faith through revelation of God's truth; and so those who see might become blind - so that we might learn what it is to walk by faith rather than by sight.

The passage ends on a down note, since in verse 41, Jesus condemns the Pharisees for claiming falsely that they have truth on their side, even though they have been confronted by irrefutable proof - , even confronted with proof based on their very own belief system. They have been exposed by the light of God's righteous judgment for the wicked frauds they are – as the blind leading the blind (See Mt.15:14) in their insistence to lead the people on in a sinful and lost direction, simply to ensure their own positions of privilege in society, and to avoid challenging those beliefs that keep their followers and themselves in bondage to the law...But there is actually great good news here too. It is God's judgment of righteousness that saves us in the end. Because you see, it's true that Jesus came into our world to change it forever. And he does bring with him the light of righteous judgment that shines into the darkness of every nook and cranny in this messed-up planet. And in that light of righteous judgment, you and I are shown to be broken humanity, all sharing Adam's guilt, who have all fallen short of Godly glory. But in an inexorable and wondrous way, that holy light of righteousness also imputes to each and every believer pardon from sin. And this light that the darkness will never overcome enables those who believe and accept the Lordship of Jesus to be truly alive in Christ, clothed in his righteousness in the eyes of the Creator God, a righteousness credited to us by the precious blood of Calvary, and received by grace through the faith in Christ Jesus. So, it would seem that seeing by this world's terms is NOT believing. For we cannot be saved you and I until we are all somewhat blinded to the things of this world – blinded by God light.

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.

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