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Looking Closely at Jesus

(6:6-11)

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“And it came about on another Sabbath, that He entered the synagogue and was teaching; and there was a man there whose right hand was withered. And the scribes and the Pharisees were watching Him closely, to see if He healed on the Sabbath, in order that they might find reason to accuse Him . . .” (6:6-11).

Two men were walking down Fifth Avenue in New York City. One suddenly stopped and said, “I hear a cricket; do you?” His friend scoffed and said, “How in the world can you hear a cricket on Fifth Avenue?” The first replied that he was a trained naturalist and was thus trained to hear crickets. He said that being trained to hear a sound makes all the difference. To prove his point he reached into his pocket and took out a fifty-cent piece and dropped it to the pavement. Immediately ten people stopped in their tracks. He thus demonstrated an obvious point—we hear only that which has meaning to us. This principle applies to religious perspectives. We can develop our sense of expectation and train ourselves to open our minds to God’s truth or close our minds behind traditionalism.

Many are like those who would hear the coin but miss the cricket. Our attention has been trained to hear selected sounds. A tragic downside to this fact is the approach many people take in religious matters. Many possess a selected vision of Scripture. These believe only a part of the Bible and are “deaf” to other parts. They are well illustrated by the scribes and the Pharisees in 6:6-11.

This text records the activities of our Lord on a certain Sabbath (cf. Matthew 12; Mark 3). The Lord had entered the synagogue to teach. There He discovered a man with a withered hand. Because of this he was marked in Jewish society as “imperfect.” In that assembly were scribes and Pharisees. These religious leaders were anxious to find grounds upon which they could publicly humiliate Christ. They were aware of the impaired man’s presence. Some suggest that they had planted the man so they could accuse Christ of violating the Sabbath. Whether the man was deliberately brought or just happened to be present, he served the evil desires of these religious leaders. Christ “knew” their evil plot. The atmosphere became electrifying when Jesus asked the man with the withered hand to stand. The crowd knew conflict was unavoidable, but it was with ease that our Lord disarmed the dastardly plot. Jesus exerted no “extra” effort that would violate the Sabbath’s traditions. The man with the withered hand was not guilty of Sabbath-breaking either. The scribes and the Pharisees were exposed as being callous and insensitive.

Notice especially the phrase “And the scribes and the Pharisees were watching Him closely” (6:7). Here was a group intent on observing every word, action, and movement of Christ. Their attention was rapt, yet they failed to see Him! They are well described by Jeremiah: “O foolish and senseless people, who have eyes, but see not; who have ears, but hear not” (Jeremiah 5:21). Although these looked closely, they could not see! How tragic!

This flaw of the scribes and the Pharisees is shared by many today. These are much like those described as walking “in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart” (Ephesians 4:17, 18). They look closely at Jesus but they cannot see Him! They are well described with these words of an early nineteenth-century minister: “They were as blind as owls to the light of God, keen sighted as hawks for trivial breeches of their cobweb regulations, and cruel as vultures to tear with beak and claw.” One man has said, “Compassion and kindness of heart were as much dried up in them as this man’s hand was in him.”

A close look at this assembly brings the following characters into focus.

A COMPASSIONATE SAVIOR

You cannot miss the tenderness and sympathy of our Lord. Even those who hated Him had to concede His compassion. In fact, they were counting on His compassion to provide a means of accusation. This great compassion was the subject of Isaiah’s prophetic word, “Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, in His arm He will gather the lambs, and carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes” (Isaiah 40:11). Matthew’s Gospel account records that Christ’s compassion was the fulfillment of inspired prophecy (cf. Matthew 8:16, 17; 9:30; 20:34; etc.). Those in the Sabbath assembly saw the great compassion of Christ, yet they did not see.

Our Lord’s compassion was revealed in His response to the critical Pharisees. Mark 3:5 records that Christ was “grieved at their hardness of heart.” The word “grieved” refers to a deep pain felt by our Lord. Christ knew of their hard hearts, obstinate attitudes, and unreasonable positions. And He was hurt by such! Any man would have withheld compassion from such a group, but not our Lord!

As the scribes and the Pharisees sat in the synagogue, they looked closely at One whose every word and deed was controlled by compassion. Yet they failed to see Him. How tragic!

A MAN BURDENED WITH TRAGEDY

Various suggestions are given to explain this man’s handicap. Who knows what really caused

the withered hand? The only point we need to notice is that here was someone utterly helpless and powerless to aid himself.

Those critical judges in the assembly saw the man with cold-hearted eyes. There was no compassion from them or sympathy for his predicament. Even when he was healed, they were not glad. They were impervious to obvious needs. They looked closely but did not see!

Such behavior is addressed in James 2:1-13. God’s compassion has compelled His children to be compassionate. All who fail to show sympathy will face God’s harsh judgment.

Those in the assembly saw a man with a withered hand, but actually they saw nothing at all! Christ had tried to open their eyes to this fault several times. In Matthew 25:44, 45, He presented a parable on the judgment. Those who heard the doomed “depart” were those who failed to show compassion in daily life. In the parable, the doomed are incredulous. We read, “‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?’ Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’” Christ’s point is clear. But those who “looked closely” at Him never saw this great truth! Over and over Christ tried to emphasize the need of compassion to His audiences (cf. Luke 10:29; John 4:35; etc.).

The story about this man may come too close to home. He forces each of us to inventory our compassion. Acts of kindness which would be eagerly performed for Christ are not even considered for “even the least” in our daily contacts. Honesty demands that we answer the question that the man asked: “How compassionate am I to the tragedies suffered by others around me?”

Caught up in themselves, the Pharisees could not rejoice over the great blessing found by this one who had been burdened with tragedy so long in life. No wonder our Lord was grieved.

A GROUP OF SELF-RIGHTEOUS “RELIGIOUS” PEOPLE

The scribes and the Pharisees looked closely at Jesus but never looked at themselves! They claimed to have had the absolute interpretation of God’s will, but they failed to follow it (Matthew 23:3, 4). They sat looking at One who was

perfect in graciousness, goodness, and power, but they could not see their own failings!

They and others like them are well described by Paul: "For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself" (Galatians 6:3). The Laodicean brethren fell into this deception (Revelation 3:17, 18). Like the Pharisees in Luke 6, the Laodiceans were smug in self-righteousness. They looked closely at others' faults but were ignorant of their own failings. This kind of smugness is a trait of the "true fool" (cf. Proverbs 12:15; 26:12; Isaiah 5:21).

First, notice how easy it is to fall prey to the error of the scribes and the Pharisees! We can come with fixed minds and determined thoughts and *never* consider the Lord's will for our lives! A most frightening thought is that Christ could come and stand in our worship assemblies and look around with grief because some harbor hardened hearts.

Second, think of the tragedy of spiritual blindness! Those in Luke 6 were guilty of "hardness of heart" (cf. Mark 3:5). This phrase refers to their stubborn resistance to God's purposes, an arrogant pride. They considered themselves intellectual, yet they were stupid (Proverbs 26:12). The folly that comes to those with hardened hearts is illustrated with the three consequences which come to the Pharisees: blindness to Christ's deity, blindness to other's problems, and blindness to one's true condition.

Third, focus upon the blessings available to all who care enough to look closely and discover Christ. As happened with the man's withered hand, all who obey Christ will be made whole! Those possessing the attitude of this man will not hesitate to obey Christ's commands. There will be an immediate willingness to confess Christ as God's Son, to repent and live as God's Word commands, to be immersed for the forgiveness of sins, and to walk by faith in daily life. Just as the man with the withered hand trusted in Christ to heal him, so the penitent sinner trusts Christ to wash away his sin (Romans 10:13; Acts 22:16).

Fourth, focus upon the consequences of looking closely at Jesus. If we fail to look honestly, we will join those who oppose God's will. The scribes and the Pharisees left the assembly determined to join forces with anyone as long as they could destroy Christ. And they did! All who fail to see Him as the Lord of all will stand in opposition to

Him and in league with all who oppose His kingdom. Not only will they join in opposition, but they will be filled with "rage" (6:11; Mark 3:6). Those who never look closely at Christ in a sincere and searching manner will never find the wonderful peace of Christ (John 14:27). They choose to train themselves to hear ritualistic doctrine that never presents the whole message of New Testament Christianity. In contrast, those who look closely at Jesus and find in Him the divine answer for sin will rejoice in His salvation (Acts 8:39).

What choices have you made regarding Christ? How honest have you been as you have looked at the Savior?

CONCLUSION

A number of interesting legends are associated with Christianity. They are not inspired and ought to be treated as "myths" of little consequence. One such legend tells about Frodobert of the seventh century. It says he was inspired with the love of God from early childhood. His mother was blind. He greatly loved and pitied her on account of her affliction. In an outburst of affection he kissed her darkened eyes and they were miraculously opened. The myth concludes that "love opens the eyes of the blind."

In the context of 6:6-11, we see that the love of Christ sought to open the blinded eyes of the Pharisees in the synagogue. The cure for spiritual blindness is a devout love for Christ! Such a love moves us to obedience and zealous service in His cause.

When you assemble for worship, what do you see? Let us look closely at Jesus and follow His directions.

The Lord's Ability

(Luke 6:6-11)

1. He is able to neutralize bitter prejudice and help us overcome it (6:7).
2. He is able to comfort life's sorrows and offer restoration (6:6, 10).
3. He is able to examine our inner thoughts and bring them to public knowledge (6:9).
4. He is able to utilize reason and common sense to teach men how to live (6:9).
5. He is able to confound and overcome those who are opposed to Him (6:11).