

ARE YOU TOO AFRAID TO SPEAK OR UPHOLD THE TRUTH?

Today's Text: Jn 9: 1-41

Extracts:

Therefore they said to him, "How were your eyes opened?" He answered and said, "A Man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to the pool of Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed, and I received sight."...*Therefore some of the Pharisees said, "This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath."* Others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them. ...So they again called the man who was blind, and said to him, "Give God the glory! We know that this Man is a sinner." He answered and said, "Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know. One thing I know; that though I was blind, now I see."...Then they reviled him and said, "You are His disciple, but we are Moses' disciples" [Jn 9: 10-11, 16, 24-25, 28]

On Friday, 5 August 2011, an unexpected event happened for the first time in the history of the United States of America. Standard & Poor's (S & P), the oldest of the three major credit rating agencies in the world (the others are Moody's and Fitch), downgraded America's credit rating from AAA to AA+.¹ A downgrade means that it will now be more expensive for the US government to borrow money. Much more, the downgrade makes America "inferior" to 19 other countries, including the UK, Germany and Singapore, on credit rating. Among the reasons given by S&P was "that elected officials remain wary of tackling the structural issues required to effectively address the rising US public debt burden in a manner consistent with a 'AAA' rating and with 'AAA' rated."

While Americans are bemoaning the threat to their international image as the biggest economy and most powerful nation in the world, very few commentators have commended S & P for confronting their country's huge debt problem crying to be fixed. It was not afraid to speak or uphold that truth. How about you? There may be issues in your life or family or place of work or worship that need to be addressed. Have you been too scared or too timid to speak or uphold the truth about them? In this week's Bible story, a man born blind that was healed by Jesus found himself defending the Lord's work against the agnostic resistance of some Jewish religious leaders. We all have something to learn from that story for our own good.

¹ Based on Mark Mardell, "How Washington politicians downgraded America," *BBC News*, 6 August 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-14431319> and Rebecca Marston, "What is a rating agency?" *BBC News*, 18 April 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10108284>

1. Background: A young man defends the work of Jesus!

What is truth? You may recall the famous encounter between Jesus and the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, during the Lord's trial. When Pilate asked Him if He was the King of the Jews, Jesus replied that His kingdom is not of this world; otherwise His servants would have fought to prevent Him from being delivered to the Jews. Then, Pilate asked Him, "Are You a king then?" In response, Jesus said that He is indeed a king and it was for that cause that He was born into the world that He should bear witness to the truth. He ended by saying, "Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." Perhaps to justify himself, Pilate asked back, "What is truth?" [**Jn 18: 33-38**].

Ordinarily, truth means *an invariant reality* which you may or may not be able to prove scientifically. However, some people claim that truth depends on what you believe in. For example, Muslims cannot accept that Jesus is the Son of God because they believe in an *Allah* that is unknowable. Non-Christians find it difficult to accept that Jesus is the only way to God because that makes their claim to true worship indefensible. Even some Christians battle with the doctrine of the Trinity. It does not matter whether you can prove it or not. It does not count whether you accept it or not. What is true is true is true! One day, it will be known to all and then it becomes too late to change your mind about it!

With respect to Jesus the Christ, He Himself has told us, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me" [**Lk 24: 44**]. It is statistically impossible for all the prophecies in the Old Testament to be fulfilled in one person unless He is indeed the Messiah. Even before humans recognized Him, demons already proclaimed Jesus "the Son of God" [**Mk 3: 11**]. Thomas, one of His skeptical disciples, once he was able to prove that the risen Jesus was the same as the crucified one, fell on his face and acknowledged Him as his Lord and his God [**Jn 20: 24-28**]. Therefore, *whether the world likes it or not, whether you accept it or not, the truth is that Jesus is the Christ, the only begotten Son of God.*

That was the truth that the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders in this week's Bible story had to deal with. He had just told some of them contending with Him in the temple that their father Abraham rejoiced to see His day; he saw it and was glad. They asked Him how He could have seen Abraham when He was not yet fifty years old. He replied, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham, I AM." As they tried to stone Him, He simply walked through their midst and went out [**Jn 8: 56-59**]. It was soon after that event that He passed by a man born blind. He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva. Then He anointed the eyes of the blind man and asked him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. He obeyed and came back whole. He was brought to the Pharisees and that was where the drama began [**Jn 9: 1-13**].

A blind man had been made well. That was an irrefutable fact. He was healed by Jesus. There were witnesses to prove that. Those were settled issues. What the Pharisees were not willing to accept or even hear was the deity of Jesus, the son of a mere carpenter! Here is how they fought to kill the truth over which the young man challenged them:

a) *It was not a miracle!*

The Jewish leaders did not believe that the man who had just received his sight had been born blind [v. 18]. We can call that a **medical challenge**. Some skeptics find it difficult to accept miracles and they will try to find medical or scientific explanations for them. For example, some skeptics dismiss the virgin conception of Jesus as a figment of human imagination. Such skeptics cannot believe that prophecies, visions and dreams can be more truthful than scientific evidence. They hardly realize, for example, that at the time that scientists and even the church held that the earth was flat, Isaiah the prophet, without any scientific gadgets and with dim eyes prophesied hundreds of years before the birth of Christ, “It is He [the LORD] who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers” [Is. 40: 22]. While space scientists are still searching fruitlessly for human life in other planets, the word of God has long established the earth as the only “inhabited world” [Prov. 8: 31].

Truth can be delayed or distorted but it cannot be destroyed. The young man knew the ordeal that he had borne from his birth and nobody could take his new joy away from him. As his neighbours and those who had seen him begging wondered if he was the same person that they knew, he said, “I am he.” When they asked how his sight was restored, he said, “A Man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, ‘Go to the pool of Siloam and wash.’ So I went and washed, and I received sight” [Jn 9: 8-11]. ***The miracle was real and he showed it!***

b) *Even if it was a miracle, it could be suppressed!*

To kill the evidence, the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders resorted to different gimmicks. Firstly, they claimed that Jesus could not have come from God because “He does not keep the Sabbath.” They wondered how a sinner could do such signs. ***The man’s answer rebuked their insinuations! When they asked him what he had to say about the man that had opened his eyes, he said, “He is a prophet” [Jn 9: 16-17]!***

When that did not work, they called the parents of the man to testify about their son. His parents were afraid to speak the truth to men in authority “because they feared the Jews [who] had agreed already that if anyone confessed that [Jesus] was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue. So, his parents answered cleverly by saying, “He is of age; ask him.” This

tactic is called ***buck-passing***. When some of us have the opportunity to tell it like it is, we fail for fear of losing material privileges, such as power or money. For example, Roman soldiers that guarded the tomb where Jesus was buried took “a large sum of money” from Jewish leaders to lie that His disciples had come to steal His body while they were sleeping [Matt. 28: 11-15]. But the Jews in this week’s Bible story could not bribe or intimidate the young man made well. When they turned back to him and asked him to give glory to God instead of a sinner, he replied boldly, “***Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know. One thing I know; that I was blind, now I see***” [Jn 9: 24-25].

c) *Even if He was not a sinner, Jesus is not the Messiah!*

The leaders reviled the young man and called him a disciple of Jesus whereas they were Moses’ disciples, adding, “We know that God spoke to Moses; as for this fellow, we do not know where He is from.” The young man responded with scorn and ended emphatically, “***If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing.***” That was too much for them and they cast him out of the temple [vv. 28-34].

No matter what evidence was available to them, the Jewish leaders had made up their minds not to accept Jesus as the Christ. The young man was not impressed with that. He spoke and defended the truth even to the point of his being thrown out of the temple. Soon after, Jesus revealed Himself to the young man as the Christ and he worshipped Him, saying, “Lord, I believe” [vv. 35-41]. Therefore, ***when you are too afraid to speak or uphold the truth, you have deliberately chosen blindness that leads to spiritual death.*** That is the message from this week’s study.

2. Developing your ability to speak or uphold the truth

You know that what some of your family members are doing contradicts the word of God. You know that what your pastor preaches from the pulpit is not matched by his conduct among certain members of the congregation. You know that the leaders in your place of work do not tolerate any suggestions or advice that they consider critical of their immoral conduct or poor work. Your keeping quiet could make things worse but your intervention could provoke some crisis. Therefore, you need to learn how to speak or uphold the truth for effective results. Here are some hints that you may find quite helpful:

a) *Know the truth yourself!*

You cannot uphold what you do not know. You cannot give what you do not have. Therefore, the first thing is for you to be sure that you know the truth that you are upholding. Jesus has said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” [Jn 14: 6]. He is

the same yesterday, today and forever [**Heb. 13: 8**]. That is why Paul told the Corinthian church, “I am determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” [**1 Cor. 2: 2**]. So, *if you know the word of God concerning Jesus (as recorded in the Scriptures), you can discern between truth and error.*

In that sense, you must differentiate between being religious and being born again. For example, the Exodus Church in Gorinchem, central Holland is part of the mainstream Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PKN).² They use conventional Christian hymns, the Lord’s Prayer and readings from the Bible in their services. However, they believe that since the post-modern society no longer has the same belief in certainty as in the past, Christianity needs to “take God out of the box” and become attractive to modern worshippers. Consequently, they regard Jesus as a special man but not the Son of God. Even God seems unknowable to them. A member that had been going to that church for 20 years has said, “Here you believe what you want to think for yourself, what you really feel and believe is true.” A Dutch critic of the church has noted that the moment you take Jesus Christ out of the Church, you lose the core of Christianity. Therefore, if a few true worshippers were to find themselves in that kind of church, they should be bold enough to leave or, if they choose to remain, overcome error “by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony” [**Rev. 12: 11**].

b) *Learn how to speak or uphold truth for effect*

Truth is bitter but only to the hearer! Therefore, you must find a way to say it so as to make it palatable. It does not mean that you should water it down. For example, when God sent the prophet Nathan to tell David about his sin of adultery with Bathsheba, he used a projective technique. He told the story of a rich man who killed the only little ewe lamb of a poor man to entertain his visitor instead of taking from his rich flock. David was so angry that he pronounced the harsh judgment of death for such a person. The prophet was then able to say boldly to David, “You are the man!” [**2 Sam. 12: 1-7**]. On the other hand, Paul openly withstood Peter at Antioch for hypocrisy. Before some Jewish church leaders had joined them from Jerusalem, Peter ate with the Gentiles. But, as soon as the Jerusalem team arrived, Peter and Barnabas separated themselves for fear of the men of circumcision. Paul openly denounced their action because “they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel” [**Gal. 2: 11-14**].

Sometimes, you must be ready to lose material opportunities or privileges to uphold the truth of your faith. For example, you cannot claim to be born-again and perform abortions in your medical practice. You cannot

² Robert Pigott, “Dutch rethink Christianity for a doubtful world,” *BBC News*, 5 August 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-14417362>

claim to be a believer and take or give bribes. Your life could even be on the line as in the case of Stephen who was martyred on account of his bold defence of his faith in Jesus Christ [**Acts 7: 54-60**]. Or you could refuse to obey immoral instructions, just like the Hebrew midwives who “feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the Hebrew male children alive.” For their bravery, God provided households for them [**Ex. 2: 15-21**].

What is important is that you do not deny Jesus before men so that He does not deny you before His Father in heaven [**Matt. 10: 33**]. Whoever is ashamed of Him and His words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He returns in His own glory, and in His Father’s, and of the holy angels [**Lk 9: 26**]. *Therefore it is better for you to be right and be despised than to be politically correct and lose your spiritual integrity*

3. Conclusion: We were all born blind!

We are not in any way different from that young man in this week’s Bible story. He was born blind *physically*; we were born blind *spiritually*. His blindness had nothing to do with his or his parents’ sins but it was an opportunity for God’s works to be manifested in him [**Jn 9: 3**]. Our spiritual blindness was not due to our or our parents’ sins but an opportunity for the redeeming work of God for mankind to be manifested in us through Jesus [**Jn 3: 16**]. Jesus anointed the blind man’s eyes with clay and sent him to wash in the pool of Siloam. He did and came back seeing. Jesus sent us to be baptized by water and the Holy Spirit and we came out born again, able to see the kingdom of God [**Jn 3: 3**]! So, if he could speak so boldly about Christ, why can’t you?

Jesus said to those Jews who believed in Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” [**Jn 8: 31-32**]. So, like the man in our story, you can now go out with boldness to speak or uphold the truth concerning your salvation through Jesus. You may not need to openly confront error everywhere you find it but by your fruits, you may preach a more effective gospel. If others see you doing whatever is true, noble, just, pure, and lovely and of good report, they will notice the peace of God in you [**Phil. 4: 8-9**] and aspire to be like you. That way, you have spoken without opening your mouth!

Are you still too afraid to speak or uphold the truth?