

“Faith and Intimidation”

August 3, 2014

Text: John 9:18-23

“If they want to execute me, then they should go ahead and do it, because I’m not going to change my faith.”

That’s what 27 year-old Meriam Ibrahim told her husband Daniel on May 11, when a Sudanese judge said that she had 3 days to decide whether to recant her Christian faith, or to be hanged.

On May 15, she stood before the judge again & told him she would die, rather than live in denial of her faith.

Meriam’s father had been a Muslim, her mother a Christian.

The father had left their home when Meriam was only 6 years old, but Sudanese law considered her a Muslim simply because that had been her father’s religion.

Having “abandoned” the Moslem religion, Meriam was considered an apostate, so she was to be executed.

Because Sudan’s government refused to recognize her marriage to a Christian man—Daniel Wani—she was also considered an adulteress—another reason for her to be executed.

There was also one other complication in Meriam’s case.

She/Daniel had a 1-year-old son, & she was pregnant again.

Daniel is a biochemist, an American citizen, & a disabled person, confined to a wheelchair.

The Sudanese government gave Meriam a 2 year stay of execution to give birth, & to wean the baby.

After that, she was to receive 100 lashes, & then be hanged.

Meanwhile, her 1 year-old son was to live w/ her in prison.

As Meriam went into labor, her feet were shackled to the floor.

She told a reporter=> “I gave birth chained. Not cuffs but chains on my legs. I couldn't open my legs.”

As a result, Meriam's baby girl was injured during the

birth, & Meriam says=> “I don't know in the future whether she'll need support to walk or not.”

Fortunately, due to the grace of God, & to an international outcry,

the whole family has now been released, and they plan to

settle/live in Manchester, New Hampshire.

Jesus Christ has done a spiritual miracle w/i each true believer.

He has opened our spiritual eyes, just as He opened the literal eyes of the blind man in Jn 9 (which we've been studying).

And like the blind man, we are bound to tell others what He has done for us, not denying our faith in Him.

Even when they are enemies of Christ, who intimidate us.

Meriam Ibrahim's testimony is to be ours, & every other

believer's testimony too=> “If they want to execute me, then they should go ahead and do it, because I'm not going to change my faith.”

Most of us will prob. never face the prospect of being hanged, for our faith, but those whom Christ has saved should willingly speak about Him to others.

That was the understanding when we became born again=>

*“that if you **confess with your mouth** Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom 10:9).*

Our baptism was just our first official opportunity to speak up, and tell others what Jesus has done for us.

We are debtors to Christ, who have an obligation, to testify of Him.

We cannot remain faithful to Him & decline to confess Him.

Each one of us knows what He has done for us personally, and what mercy He has shone to us.

So we have a responsibility to declare His name & His grace to others when we have opportunity to do so.

But today’s text is about 2 people who did not testify of Jesus’ grace/mercy, when they could-have/should-have.

They were the parents of the man born blind, whom Jesus had healed.

They illustrate for us what we all know all too well=> the power of Christ’s opponents to intimidate those who owe Him their very lives.

The blind man’s parents were intimidated by Jesus’ Jewish opponents.

**As we'll see in our text, the Apostle John looked at this story
from three different angles=>**

- * The Jews' intimidation
- * The parents' caution (& hesitation)
- * The parents' fear

*** The Jews' Intimidation**

[John 9:18-19]=> *“The Jews then did not believe it of him, that he had been blind and had received sight, until they called the parents of the very one who had received his sight, / and questioned them, saying, ‘Is this your son, who you say was born blind? Then how does he now see?’”*

**“The Jews” John mentioned here were the same people called
the “Pharisees” in last Sunday’s text.**

John liked to vary his terminology, & he did so here.

These were Jewish religious leaders—not the Jewish people in general.

These religious leaders are seen in John’s Gospel as the ones whose hatred of Christ pursued Him to the cross & to His death.

Because the Jewish people knew how dangerous these men could be when they turned against a person, they feared them.

- * Jn 7 describes the crowds at a Jewish feast saying=>

*“No one was speaking openly of Him for **fear of the Jews**” (7:13).*

- * In Jn 19, Joseph of Arimathea is described as a “*secret*” disciple of Jesus, “*for **fear of the Jews**” (19:38).*

* After Jesus' crucifixion, the Apostles hid in the Upper Room w/ the doors/windows locked, "*for fear of the Jews*" (20:19).

These were very intimidating—even frightening—people.

These Jewish leaders refused to believe the blind man's testimony, that although he'd always been blind, Jesus healed him.

That He had put clay on his eyes & then told him to wash it off, in the Pool of Siloam.

As we saw last time, their hardened unbelief was impervious to evidence of the blind man's healing, to the reasonable argument of others that if Jesus were a sinful man, He could not have accomplished such a healing, & to the man's own personal testimony that Jesus had healed him.

They had made up their minds that the man's story was false because Jesus couldn't have healed him;

And they thought it was their job to prove it by detecting & exposing where the deception/subterfuge lay hidden:

* They thought maybe he wasn't even the same man his neighbors had always known as a blind man.

* Maybe he was the same man, but he'd faked his blindness all along.

The Pharisees had assumed from the beginning of this discussion that Jesus must be a sinful man because He had violated their rabbinical rules/regulations about the Sabbath.

They weren't about to yield on this point, because doing so would inevitably lead to their having to admit Jesus actually had healed, through the power of God.

I.e., that He was a man sent by God from heaven.

Hoping to divert attention away from the question of how a sinner could possibly exercise God's power to heal anyone, they had made the mistake of asking the blind man=>

"What do you say about Him, since He opened your eyes?"

They figured that he (a lowly beggar) had nothing much to say that might have any significance.

But he promptly answered: *"He is a prophet."*

Chagrin must have spread over the Pharisees' faces.

Determined to get to the bottom of this problem, the Jews decided to call for testimony from the man's parents.

- * If he was an imposter & not the actual blind man, the parents would certainly be able to detect/recognize that.
- * If he hadn't really been blind from birth, they'd know that too.

These Jews were looking for evidence to support their prejudice that Jesus could not possibly have healed anyone, esp. one blind from birth.

They illustrate the principle we saw last time, that unbelief cannot be overcome by empirical evidence alone.

When you throw evidence at it that disproves it, unbelief simply dismisses your evidence, and demands more.

You can feed it evidence all day long, but it will never be enough to convince/satisfy unbelievers.

When a cult teacher knocks on your door, you can do a superb job of showing him the truth, but it prob. won't even slow down his presentation of heresy.

When you think you've nailed him, he will simply ignore/sidestep everything you've said, & switch to another line of argument.

Unbelief simply/absolutely refuses to acknowledge the truth, no matter what.

Francois Voltaire (18th cent. French atheist) admitted it=>

“If in the market of Paris, before the eyes of a thousand men, and before my own eyes, a miracle should be performed, I would much rather disbelieve the two thousand eyes and my own two, than believe it.”

In our own text we see the lengths to which unbelief drove the Pharisees, as they persecuted anyone who believed in Christ Jesus.

They were determined not to believe, & not to let anyone else believe in Jesus either.

No matter how compelling the evidence might be, they had determined not to let it convince them.

Later, Jews like them would actually stop their ears when Stephen preached the truth.

Unbelievers are ultimately unteachable people.

The Jews in our text intimidated the blind man's parents, as they questioned them, asking=>

“Is this your son, who you say was born blind? Then how does he now see?”

The questioners attacked the parents as if they were guilty of making these statements themselves, though they hadn't actually said anything.

Even if they had said these things, it would have been the simple truth.

But the aggressive tone of the Pharisees' words was sure to put them on edge, to put them on the defense right away.

It seems obvious that the Pharisees' demeanor was intentionally intimidating by design, & it succeeded in making the parents cautious.

They didn't want any trouble from these powerful Jews.

*** The Parents' Caution**

[Verses 20]=> *“His parents answered them and said, ‘We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind;’”*

The blind man's father/mother cautiously made a simple statement that was true & wouldn't get them in trouble.

They answered the Jews' first 2 questions=> Yes, the man was their own son, and yes, he had been blind from birth.

But with these answers the parents inadvertently eliminated 2 explanations the Jews had hoped would account for the

rumored healing, apart from a divine miracle performed by Jesus=>

- * The man wasn't an imposter, but the son of this couple.
- * And he hadn't faked his own blindness to deceive anyone into falsely thinking that Jesus had healed him.
He had been blind all this life.

However, the parents prob. weren't as truthful in answering the Pharisees' third question=>

[Verse 21]=> *“but how he now sees, we do not know; or who opened his eyes, we do not know. Ask him; he is of age, he will speak for himself.”*

2 lines of evidence would indicate that the blind man had indeed told his parents about Jesus having healed him.

They're both circumstantial, but certainly worth noting.

1) He seems to have gone home after he was healed, because his own local neighbors were the first people to question him about it.

One would think that, of all the people he'd like to see for the first time, his own parents would top the list.

So it's very likely that he went home, saw them, and talked w/ them about his healing.

2) We will find in verse 22, the reason that these parents answered as evasively as they did, was their fear of the Jews, knowing how they'd react if the parents told them, Jesus had healed their son of blindness.

If they hadn't known about that, they wouldn't have had to fear it, or hide it.

The parents might have justified their being less than candid.

* They could have rationalized=> "We weren't there, so anything we might tell them would merely be hearsay."

* Or, "It's important that we maintain our position in the community & our relationship w/ its leaders.

"Getting them mad at us just doesn't make sense."

* Or, "We're too old to be making enemies. Our son is young & handles these kinds of situations well."

But ultimately, their answers to the Pharisees show a lack of integrity/courage, due to their fear about how they might be treated.

Not everyone's a Meriam Ibrahim—they certainly weren't.

The parents directed the Jews to their son, saying=>

"Ask him; he is of age, he will speak for himself."

A Jewish boy was "*of age*" as soon as he turned 13.

But given the fact that the blind man seems to have made a living by begging, he was prob. older than that.

The parents knew—as we will see next time—that he was indeed very adept at "speaking for himself."

But you cannot help feeling there's a sense of callousness in the reaction of the blind man's parents.

They seem to be saving themselves at the expense of their own son—a man who (although he can now see) has endured a life of difficulty due to his blindness. These are certainly not what you'd call “over protective parents.”

To put it politely, they seem to be cautious to a fault.

To put it bluntly, their reaction smacks of cowardice and self-interest that would throw their own son under the bus.

* **The Parents' Fear**

[Verses 22-23]=> *“His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone confessed Him to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue. / For this reason his parents said, ‘He is of age; ask him.’”*

The Jewish leaders of Jerusalem were desperately trying to stem the tide of speculation about Jesus' being the Christ.

* In Jn 4 the woman at the well had said of Jesus=> *“this is not the Christ, is it?”* (Jn 4:29).

But she was a Samaritan, & the Jews' expected Samaritans to be easy prey to such supposed “heresy.”

* In Matt 12, Jesus healed a blind/demonized mute in Galilee.

The amazed Jewish crowds asked=> *“This man cannot be the Son of David [messianic title], can he?”* (12:23).

This was more bothersome for Jerusalem's religious leaders because these were actually Jews saying it, not Samaritans.

But at least it was still up north, not in Jerusalem.

* Then during the Jewish feasts, such speculation about Jesus being the Christ had begun to infiltrate Jerusalem itself, so the leaders started plotting against Jesus—and everyone there knew it.

When Jesus came to the feast, & started teaching, people said=> *“Look, He is speaking publicly, and they are saying nothing to Him. The rulers do not really know that **this is the Christ**, do they?”* (Jn 7:26).

Some even ventured to speculate=> *“When the Christ comes, He will not perform more signs than those which this man has, will He?”* (Jn 7:31).

Because it had become public knowledge that the Jewish leaders were even plotting to kill Jesus, everyone—including the blind man's parents—was afraid to say anything favorable about Jesus at all.

The threat which the Jews were hanging over everyone's head was expulsion from the synagogues.

This was a dreaded punishment for the Jews because it was not only a curse, but meant becoming ostracized from all one's neighbors, not only on a religious level, but socially and in business dealings/relations as well.

In chapter 12, John says=> *“Many even of the rulers*

*believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for **fear** that they would be **put out of the synagogue** ” (12:42).*

Jesus had warned His followers from the beginning it would come down to this, if they continued on as His disciples.

Even in the Sermon on the Mount, He had said=>

*“Blessed are you when men hate you, and **ostracize** you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the **sake of the Son of Man** ” (Lk 6:22).*

Right up to the last night of His life, Jesus was warning His

Apostles in the Upper Room=> *“They will make you **outcasts from the synagogue** ” (Jn 16:2).*

Jewish Christians suffered exclusion from their own people, simply because they had followed Christ.

Being “unsynagogued” would be frightening for any Jew, but especially for poor Jews such as the blind beggars’ parents.

We can sympathize with the blind man’s parents, but we cannot allow them to become the standard for our on faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

We can’t use them as an excuse for our own failure to tell people what Jesus has done for us, even when faced w/ threats for doing so.

Meriam Ibrahim didn’t, & if it comes down to it, we can’t either.

The blind man’s father/mother were willing to confess that he was their son, & that he was born blind, but they wouldn’t go any further, for fear of excommunication.

Feeling no obligation to risk persecution, they not only abandoned their own son to the Jews' hostility, they abandoned the Healer of his eyes.

I'm not saying that we need to jump into every battle over every related-issue that pertains to the church.

It's better to pick our battles and get engaged in them at a time, in a way, and to a degree we can have the greatest impact & do the most good.

But we must always speak up when the issue is Jesus Himself, and what He has done for us by healing our spiritual eyes to see the truth, and saving our souls from sin/death/hell.

Jesus' own words leave us no other option.

Mt 10:27-28 (Jesus)=> *"What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops. / Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."*

Verses 32-33=> *"Everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. / But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven."*

So how do we overcome our fear?

By focusing on what our Lord has promised in His Word about His faithfulness to us.

Heb 13=> *"He Himself has said, 'I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,' / so that we confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?'"* (13:5-6).

As we'll see next time, when the Pharisees did come to the blind man, & questioned him, as his parents had suggested, he acquitted himself quite honorably.

His testimony was clear/bold, because his mind was made up about Jesus.

He was not ashamed of Christ, as Jesus Himself had said a believer must not be (Mk 8:38).

But at least one of Jesus' own disciples—Peter—was ashamed of Him, and said that he didn't even know Him (Lk 22:57).

Fortunately for Peter, and fortunately for us, even when we insult Jesus like that—as many of us have by our failure to speak about Jesus, at one time or another—He doesn't forsake us.

Jesus waited awhile, and then He went after Peter.

Three times He asked the Apostle, "*Do you love Me?*" because Peter had denied knowing Him 3 times.

And when Peter had fully acknowledged his love for his Lord, Jesus restored him to useful service in the Church, & in the Kingdom of God.

After that, Peter served his Lord faithfully, and even died a martyr's death in the end.

If the day comes when we too face serious risk to our safety or even our lives, by acknowledging our faith in Christ, may God give us the strength to say, "I do believe in Him."

“He is my friend and my Savior, and by His grace, I will never be ashamed to acknowledge His name.”

“If that’s a crime, and you’re going to execute me for it, go ahead, because I’m not going to change my faith.”

Christians must bear clear testimony for their Savior, esp. when others blaspheme His name, or hold Him up to mockery. That’s no time to remain silent, or try to smooth things over.

He laid down His life for us, so the least we can do is stand up for Him.

It doesn’t have to be from a pulpit, & in most of our cases it won’t be.

It’s more likely to take place as we lean against a post on our neighbor’s front porch;

Or as we stand in line at the grocery store, talking w/ a friend or family member as we wait.

But some people, like the blind man’s parents, do have an excuse for not speaking up for Jesus=> they don’t know Him.

He has never opened their spiritual eyes, and it’s better that they do remain silent about matters they don’t really understand. That way, at least, they won’t mislead anyone.

It’s better that they do not pretend to mercies they have not received, or to grace they’ve never experienced.

And it's far better that they don't deceive themselves that they are saved, simply because they talk about Jesus. The Jesus we talk to others, about—either publicly, or in private conversation—is not simply the “historical Jesus” the History Channel talks about.

He is the living Christ, who is still among us by His Spirit, guiding our thoughts, purifying our desires/feelings, hearing our prayers, and changing our nature/character.

If you have never come to know this living Jesus, you cannot truthfully bear witness of Him.

But He waits for you to reach out to Him by faith, asking Him to open your spiritual eyes, forgive your sin, and give you eternal life.

Then to take it upon yourself, to take your stand for Him.

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Text: John 9:18-23

“If they want to execute me, then they should go ahead and do it because I’m not going to change my faith”—Meriam Ibrahim.

1. Jesus Christ has done a spiritual miracle within each true believer; we are [12 bound] to tell others what He has done for us.
Rom 10:9
2. But today’s text is about two people who did not testify of Jesus’ grace and mercy when they could have and should have: the [16 parents] of the man born blind.

The blind man’s parents were intimidated by Jesus’ Jewish opponents; John looked at this story from three different angles...

*** The Jews’ Intimidation**

[John 9:18-19]

Jn 7:13; 19:38; 20:19

3. These Jewish leaders refused to believe the blind man’s testimony that although he had always been blind, [12 Jesus] healed him.
4. Unbelief cannot be overcome by empirical evidence alone; when you throw evidence at it that disproves it, unbelief simply dismisses your evidence and demands [10 more].
5. The Jews in our text [24 intimidated] the blind man’s parents as they questioned them.

*** The Parents’ Caution**

[Verses 20]

6. The blind man’s father and mother cautiously made a simple statement that was [10 true] and would not get them in trouble.
7. The parents weren’t as truthful in answering the [12 third] question:
[Verse 21]
8. The blind man’s parents seem to be saving themselves at the [16 expense] of their own son.

*** The Parents' Fear**

[Verses 22-23]

Jn 4:29; Mt 12:23; Jn 7:26; 7:31

9. Because it had become public knowledge that the Jewish leaders were plotting to kill Jesus, everyone (including the blind man's parents) was [14 afraid] to say anything favorable about Jesus at all.

Jn 12:42; Lk 6:22; Jn 16:2
10. We can sympathize with the blind man's parents, but we cannot use them as an excuse for [8 our] own failure to tell people what Jesus has done for us.
11. We must speak up when the issue is Jesus Himself; His own words leave us [6 no] other option.

Mt 10:27-28, 32-33; Heb 13:5-6
12. One of Jesus' own disciples (Peter) was ashamed of Him, and said that he did not even know Him; fortunately, even when we insult Jesus like that, He doesn't [16 forsake] us.

Lk 22:57; Jn 21:116-17
13. Christians must bear clear testimony for their Savior; when others blaspheme His name, that's no time to remain silent or try to [14 smooth] things over.
14. Jesus waits for you to reach out to Him by faith, asking Him to forgive your sin and give you eternal life; then to take your [12 stand] for Him.