

20/20 Vision

Scripture: Luke 6:39-40

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**May 16, 2010
Morning Service**

People of God: You have not seen me too often with my glasses on. It's been only once, that I can recall, that I was forced to wear my glasses instead of my usual contact lenses. Maybe some of you didn't even realize that I needed to wear glasses or contact lenses, but I do. And I have worn them since at least high school.

Without them, all of you sitting at the back would be very fuzzy to me. Even the cadets at the front would be a bit of blur to me. Obviously, without corrective lenses, I could not drive safely on the road. But with them, I have 20/20 vision.

20/20 vision. It's an expression that we often use and for this past year, it has been the Cadet theme. But as I was thinking about that phrase, "20/20 vision", I wondered what it actually means. I know that it deals with good eyesight; that if you have 20/20 vision, you can see properly. But why is it called 20/20 vision? Well, the term means that at twenty feet you can read the eye chart of what a normal, typical person should be able to read at 20 feet.

Today, this expression of having 20/20 vision goes beyond just having good eyesight. It's having a good insight on the events of today. It's having a proper perspective on the world. The American TV network, ABC, used that phrase 20/20 to describe its news program to analysis the events of the week.

And so having, 20/20 vision is more than just having good physical eyesight. It can also mean having good view or understanding of the world. Using vision or eyesight to make this more general point is nothing new. Jesus also uses physical sight, or the lack thereof, to make a spiritual point.

In our text, Jesus speaks about blind guides and good teachers. He wants us to have 20/20 vision, when it comes to how we see the world. His

concern here isn't about our physical eyesight (though, of course, he does want us to see properly); his concern in the text is about spiritual vision.

Our text is just two short verses of a longer sermon that Jesus gave on a level place. That's how verse 17 describes the location. This sermon of Jesus is much like the Sermon on the Mount. (And so when preachers today will repeat certain themes in different places and in different contexts, we are just following what Jesus did: repeating his message in a different setting.)

In this part of his sermon, which we read, Jesus offers a series of short warnings and corrections. Do not condemn and judge others by your own standards. Don't attempt to take the speck out of someone else's eye, until you first take the plank out of your own eye. And in the midst of these short warnings, we have the text for the Cadet theme.

"Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher." These two verses form a pair: verse 39 states the matter in a negative way, while verse 40 puts a positive spin on the matter. Together, they reveal Jesus' concern about who we follow, so that we will have 20/20 vision, seeing the world as God sees the world.

In verse 39, Jesus asks two very simple and obvious questions. The first one expects a negative answer; the second a positive one: Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into the pit? It's fairly clear, a blind man can't lead another man; or else they will both fall into a pit, which they cannot see.

On my recent vacation, I experienced what it was like not to be able to see. That's because I visited Carlsbad Caverns National Park. On the first day there, I explored the main caves, which had railings, a well-marked trail and artificial lightning. But on the second day, I took a special tour of a cave, separate from the main ones. It took a bit of a hike to get to the entrance. There were only five of us, plus two rangers to lead the way.

In this cave, there was no paved trail, no railings and no artificial lights. We had to bring a decent flashlight. One ranger led the way; another followed. After three-quarters of an hour exploring the cave, we sat down and turned off our flashlights. It was absolute darkness. You couldn't see your hand in front of your face.

What if we had to get out of the cave, without any light? Our park rangers would be useless. We'd soon all get disoriented. We'd trip over the rock formations that covered the floor of the cave. We'd soon become lost and the name of the cave would come true. It was named Slaughter Canyon Cave.

It was necessary for us to have those park rangers to be our guides. They knew the way. But if their lights went out, they would be useless to us. It would be the blind leading the blind into the abyss. We needed to be able to see where we were going. We needed good guides to lead the way. Not someone who is blind and can't see the way.

Now Jesus' concern, here, isn't with physical blindness, but with spiritual blindness. Who can lead us to God? Who can show us how to live in the world, the right way? Who can give us 20/20 vision so that we can see the world in the proper perspective?

When Jesus mentions "blind guides" did he have someone in mind? Well, in Matthew 15, in a different setting, Jesus warned the disciples about the Pharisees. He said: "Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit." (vs. 14)

Jesus often had his harshest words for the Pharisees. And in some ways, that's surprising. Because the Pharisees and Jesus were actually very close theologically. Both had a desire to serve God and to follow his commandments. And yet Jesus called them blind guides. Why is that? Because of their legalism. In their desire to be faithful to God and his law, the Pharisees stressed the letter of the law, at the expense of the spirit of the law.

They required people to do the right things in the right way and at the right time, but often the "right things" were based on tradition rather than the actual law of God. If a person did not follow the way of the Pharisees correctly, they were judged harshly by them. As a result, they ended up in works righteousness and instead of leading people to a vibrant, living relationship with God, they ended up making it difficult for people to find and know God. No wonder Jesus calls them "blind guides."

But notice that in our text, Jesus does not mention the Pharisees by name. This is more of a generic warning. Anyone who does not know the way to God is a blind guide. Anyone who cannot show you the way of salvation in Jesus Christ is a blind guide. Anyone who does not know how we ought to live as faithful disciples of Jesus in the world is a blind guide.

There are plenty of blind guides in our world. How much of what we watch on TV helps us in our relationship with God? Dare I say, not much. A hockey playoff game may be exciting and entertaining, but it doesn't help much in our walk with God. Surfing the net may provide some good information and insight, but unless you find the right websites, the Internet can lead you in the wrong direction.

The issue of following a blind guide is very serious. After all, you could end up falling into a pit. The word used here is quite strong. It's not

merely walking into the ditch, like we might have along side of the road. It's falling into a mammoth hole that you can't get out of. It's walking into a disaster.

It's like the dangers faced when hiking. On my vacation, I did a lot of hiking. When I walked I needed to watch where I was going, otherwise, danger loomed. In the desert, you have to look down at the path, as well as at the scenery, because of what might be on the trail. The danger on desert trails are snakes. Sure enough, I encountered a black-tailed rattlesnake, right at the edge of the trail. It's not an aggressive snake, but it is still dangerous. And so, I allowed it time to move away from the trail. Only when it was a safe distance away did I continue hiking.

There are pitfalls to be aware of when hiking. That's why you have to watch where you go. It's why the blind cannot lead the blind.

There are also spiritual pits that we can fall into, if we're not careful. Sin easily leads us astray. The temptations of the world can soon mess up our lives. The pursuit of money can easily take us away from our family obligations and from God. The desire to succeed can easily erode our commitment to the principles of God's kingdom.

And so, Jesus warns us against blind guides that will lead us into the pit. But he also offers a positive alternative when he says: A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher. Instead of a blind guide, we need a good teacher to follow.

In order to appreciate this statement of Jesus, we need to realize that the relationship of teacher and pupil was different in the days of Jesus than it is today. It was more personal and more character driven than today. A student could not be above his teacher, because in the days of Jesus most teaching was oral. It's what the teacher said that the student learned. There were no books, no Internet to learn more from or even to correct the teacher. You could learn as much as what the teacher knew and not more. And so, a student, a disciple would chose their teacher carefully.

In addition, modeling, living by example, was one of the key means of teaching. The goal of the student was more than knowledge, but to model what was taught. It was to live like the teacher. Character was just as important as content. A student learned by following the example of the teacher.

Who is this teacher? Again the text is generic, but the context of this passage indicates that Jesus is the teacher that we must follow. After all, Jesus is doing the teaching in this passage. And he will soon conclude, by saying that who ever hears his words and puts them into practice is like the wise man who built his house upon the rock.

Jesus is the alternative to the blind guide. We can learn much from Jesus. We can follow his example. He can lead us to our heavenly Father. He can show us how to live in this world. We just need to be willing students, to be fully trained through the Word by Jesus.

If Jesus is the ultimate teacher, then his life and his teaching must shape all those who seek to follow him. He must shape all those who seek to teach others the way to God and how to live for him. That's the challenge for these Cadet Counselors. As they seek to teach the cadets, they need to be shaped by Jesus.

But they need to realize that this teaching goes far beyond doing an actual lesson. In a program like Cadets, most of the teaching happens through modeling the faith; through living out what it is we believe. That's true not just of Cadet Counselors, but also for parents in raising their children in the fear of the Lord, or church leaders, as we seek to lead the congregation. We teach by example, by our actions, as much as by our words.

There is a need for 20/20 spiritual vision. There are many blind guides, many pit-falls in our sinful world. As a result, we need to see the way clearly to God. And in Jesus, we have the necessary teacher. He leads us to God and he shows us the way to how we can live for God.

With Jesus as our teacher, we can teach others about God and our place in the world. Then we will have 20/20 vision, seeing God properly and seeing how we ought to live for him in his world. Amen.