

Master Teacher, Part 4: Paying Attention

May 21st, 2017

As we continue our series called "The Master Teacher," I'd like to begin by looking at an amazing encounter **between Jesus and a man who was, in almost every way, ignored by the world** him.

- Starting with verse 1 of **John 9**, we read that *"As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth."*
- His disciples asked him, *"Rabbi... Why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or his parents' sins?"* ³*"It was not because of his sins or his parents' sins," Jesus answered. "This happened so the power of God could be seen in him. ⁴We must quickly carry out the tasks assigned us by the one who sent us. The night is coming, and then no one can work. ⁵But while I am here in the world, I am the light of the world."*

Just after he said this, Jesus does something very odd. We see, in **verse 6**, that **He spat on the ground and made mud** with his saliva and **spread the mud** over the man's eyes.

- Then he tells this blind man to go to the **Pool of Siloam** to wash the mud from his eyes.
- Now, the Pool of Siloam was a reservoir of freshwater built by King Hezekiah 700 before this story took place.
- By Jesus' day, it was a **major tourist spot for ancient Jews** making religious pilgrimages to the city.

So, **the man does just what Jesus asked him to do**. And when he does, he's suddenly able to see... for the first time in his life!

- In verse 8, his neighbors... and all those who had known him as a blind beggar began to ask, *"Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?"*
- Some were saying, *"He is."* The others were saying, *"No, he just looks like him."*

And yet, the beggar kept saying, *"I'm the man."* So, they asked him, *"Then what happened? How were you healed?"*

- He answered, in **verse 11**, *"The man they call Jesus made mud and spread it over my eyes and told me, 'Go to the pool of Siloam and wash yourself.' So I went and washed, and now I can see!"*

Now, as amazing as this healing was, one of the most striking part of this story is in verse 1: ***"As Jesus was walking along, He saw a man who was blind from birth."***

- Think about this... there were thousands of people surrounding Jesus... and, it was simply while "walking along" that Jesus notices someone no one paid any attention to.
- We see this SO often in the New Testament:

Jesus saw an impoverished widow, for example, **giving what little she had as an offering** to the Temple... No one noticed her... but He did.

- In spite of the thousands of people pressing up against Him, **Jesus noticed a woman** whom we're told, *"barely touched his clothes (Mark 5:27)."*
- We saw two weeks ago how **Jesus noticed Zacchaeus** hiding up in the tree.
- We saw last week how **Jesus paid attention and listened to the Samaritan woman.**

Now, **imagine a couple sitting at the breakfast table**, and the wife is pouring her heart out to her husband who's reading the newspaper.

- She can tell he's not really listening & grows more and more frustrated with him.
- Finally, **she can't contain her frustration** anymore and yells out, *"You're not listening to me!"*
- He says, *"Of course I was! I can repeat every word you said."*

And, guess what? **He does!** But, here's the question. **Is she satisfied with that?** No! And, why not?

- Because, she doesn't want him just to get the words. She's not interested in conversing with a tape recorder.

- She wants **connection!** She wants him to put down the paper, **look her in the eye and pay attention** to her. Right?

You see, ***paying attention*** to someone is one of the most powerful ways we have to communicate value to another human being.

- They've **actually done studies on this**. One of these studies was of a college professor and his class...
- Though, all the students in the class were in on this particular experiment. The professor had no idea anything was going on.

So, here's what they did. Whenever the professor **moved to the right side of the room** while speaking,

- they **wouldn't pay any attention to him at all**. They wouldn't look at him... no eye contact, nothing.
- As he moved over to the left, they would sit up straight. The farther he moved to the left, the more attention they would pay.
- When he was **way over to the wall on the left-hand side**, they would be taking notes, smiling, nodding and maintaining eye contact.

By the end of the quarter, this teacher was only lecturing from the far-left corner of the room!

- The point was, of course, that **paying attention to people shapes our behavior**... and subsequently, shapes our lives.
- You see, paying attention is a very powerful force.
- Any of you **who have spoken in a public setting** know how powerful attention is.

When you speak, there are certain faces that encourage you. Now, I speak here 40-45 Sundays per year.

- And, I have to say, you guys are amazing listeners!
- But, of course, there are some of you who physically pay attention to me by leaning forward, making regular eye contact.

- By the way you smile, nod and make eye contact, **you're saying**, *"Yes, say it. Go on. Get to it."*

Of course, not everyone does that... and that's ok. In fact, a few weeks ago, somebody fell asleep.

- It was so bad that I felt like I had to confront them. So, after church I went up to her and said,
- *"Joyce, you're my wife... is there any way you could manage to stay awake for just five minutes during my sermons!"* (just kidding!)
- Attention is so valuable! That's **why we don't always offer it**.
- In fact, when we give someone our attention, **we're actually "paying" attention...** because, it's a valuable thing.

Well, that brings us to back this blind man in John 9. This man **spent his entire life being ignored**.

- For those around him, he simply **wasn't worth noticing...** just the kind of person people would avoid.
- Now, everyone has **had the experience of walking past a homeless person** in a city, holding a sign begging for money.
- For the most part, the interaction between him and those walking past him is pretty constant.

Basically, **he'll try to catch their attention** while they will **turn their heads**, pretending they never saw him.

- We do this because, **once we pay attention...** once we make eye contact... then we feel a much stronger obligation to offer some kind of help.
- Well, that was a snapshot of this guy's whole life. No matter what he did to catch their attention,
- each and every day, **people would look the other way**. That's why even some of his neighbors didn't recognize him.

But, once again, we see Jesus paying attention to someone everyone else sees as insignificant... someone everyone else ignores.

- It's why people followed Him in such numbers. He was unlike anyone they had ever seen.
- Tax collectors and prostitutes and beggars... all of whom would be shunned by the religious leaders of the day...
- All came running to this Rabbi named Jesus.

Truth is, it may be a struggle for you to grasp just how deeply Jesus pays attention to you.

- But guys... understand that **there isn't the smallest detail of your life** that is not of immense interest to Him.
- God is not bored by the most trivial detail of your life.
- Jesus **sees** you. He **pays immense attention** to you. He **notices** you.

Jesus is just walking along... and he sees this guy whom everyone else, day after day, seems to ignore.

- In fact, **his disciples see** how he's noticed the man... and so, they ask Jesus what, to me, is a very odd question.
- Look at **verse 2**. The disciples ask Jesus, **"Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?"**

I mean think about this question. The man was born blind. How could his blindness, which existed since his birth, be caused by his own sin?

- And yet, there was a **fairly common belief in Jesus' day** that it was possible to be born into this world as a sinner...
- **not with a sinful nature**, but as an **actual sinner**.

For example, if a mother-to-be worshipped in a heathen temple, there were rabbis who taught...

- that the **unborn child was judged to be guilty of idolatry**.
- But how could they believe that. How could they think that an unborn child could sin?
- Well, I think that, for them, **it legitimized their turning away** or ignoring those who suffer...
- thinking that **these people somehow deserved** their suffering.

In those days, people often believed there was a **cause-and-effect relationship** between suffering & sin.

- **He was blind.** That was depressing to people. **He was a beggar,** and that was demanding for people.
- In their minds, he was the **product of sin**, and that was disgusting to people.
- Mothers would walk by this man with their children and tell their children *"Don't look at him. Don't listen to him. Don't go near him. Don't pay any attention to him."*

But, as Jesus is walking along, He **not only pays attention** but He comes to this man whom everyone else ignores.

- And **as He comes up to the man**, His disciples ask, *"Jesus... what's the deal here... is he like this because of his own sin or his parent's sin?"*
- Again, they're looking for a reason that would legitimize their turning away from Him.

So, Jesus says to His disciples, *"Guys... you haven't been paying attention. God has not forsaken him. God has come to him."*

- Jesus answers in **verse 3**; *"It's not because of his sins or his parent's sins... This happened so the power of God could be seen (or, revealed) in him."*
- In other words, **because we're stopping to engage with him**, this physical condition of his is going to change his spiritual condition forever.

And so, Jesus says, in verse 4, **"As long as it is day, we must do the works of Him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world."** (NIV)

Now, what does Jesus mean when He says, **"As long as it is day"**?

- What he is saying is that there is an extraordinary opportunity we've been given to minister to those we come into contact with throughout our lives.

- But **like the daytime**, the opportunities we have with these different people won't last forever.
- In other words, this extraordinary opportunity to do the works of God, is time-limited. You could miss it!

It was thirty-seven years ago, when I was a freshman in high school, that **Blues Brothers** made its way into the theaters.

- If you remember, Jake and Elwood Blues were a couple of cool musicians with a cause.
- In fact, over and over again they'd explain to people how they were **"on a mission from God!"**
- But, **how could these two guys** be on a mission from God?

It sounds a little grandiose, doesn't it? *"I'm on a mission from God."* But what's the alternative?

- The alternative is that you're not... that you're not on a mission from God... **that God has no particular calling or purpose for your life.**
- Truth is, everything in our world is designed to keep us from believing that our lives have any greater purpose than our own personal **safety, entertainment, security, and self-fulfillment.**

But, the truth about your life is that you're on a mission from God... that **you're not only called to live in all His blessings...**

- But you're **called to also be a blessing** to those around you.
- In fact, Jesus says, *"You're the salt of the earth. You're the light of the world. Together you're a city set on a hill, a light that cannot be hidden."*

Perhaps it's been too long since you've thought about it... but **you have a divine assignment...** an assignment you don't want to miss out on.

- Now, **maybe you're unclear as to what that might be.**
- Maybe you're just waiting for a very **specific job description...** and an **important title** before you take the next step.
- But, think about this. Based on our story here in Luke 9, **when** was it that Jesus did the work of God?

- Well, we read earlier from **verse 1**, that it was *as He was simply walking along!*

You see, when all this happened, Jesus wasn't teaching in the synagogue. He wasn't giving the Sermon on the Mount or feeding the 5,000.

- It all just happened as He was walking along... as He was just living out his every-day life.
- Truth is, the **main place you'll likely do the work of God** is simply as you're walking through your day-to-day life.
- It happens amongst the people and opportunities that God brings unexpectedly as you're just living out your life.

God will not ask you one day, "*Did you achieve financial security? Did you live in the right neighborhood? Did you get the big promotion?*"

- God will ask you, "***Did you do My work in your job?... With your family or friends... in your neighborhood or your school?***"
- *Did you love people? Did you extend My kingdom into your little part of the world?"*

And through this story, Jesus is saying, "*Don't miss it! Seize the day!*" because "*Night is coming*" and the **opportunities in front of you today** may not be there tomorrow.

- You are on a mission from God... a mission that **doesn't require ministry titles, job descriptions, or programs...**
- but a **willingness to engage the world around you** with the love, power, & compassion of Jesus.

The problem was that when Jesus said that "***we must quickly carry out the tasks assigned us***" by God, the people were probably unsure what "tasks" He was referring to.

- For the religious leaders, carrying out the "tasks" or "works" of God had to do with **living a rule-oriented, legalistic life.**
- Look at **verses 13-16**. "***Then they took the man who had been blind to the Pharisees, because it was on the Sabbath that Jesus had made the mud and healed him.*** The Pharisees asked

the man all about it. So, he told them, 'He put the mud over my eyes, and when I washed it away, I could see!' Some of the Pharisees said, 'This man Jesus is not from God, for He is working on the Sabbath.'"

You see, according to the Pharisees, Jesus had broken the Sabbath by healing the blind man.

- In fact, the religious leaders in Jesus' day had a list of 39 things you were not allowed to do on the Sabbath.
- For example, you weren't allowed to **cut your fingernails** on the Sabbath... you **couldn't pluck a hair** from your head or beard... you **couldn't mix knead bread** or clay.
- And so, **when Jesus used saliva and dirt to make clay**, he actually was violating one of the 39 things you couldn't do on the Sabbath.

More than that, healing was not allowed on the Sabbath. One of the rules was you could receive medical attention on the Sabbath **only if your life was in actual danger**, only if your life was threatened.

- Even then, **it could only be for the purpose of keeping you from dying**. It couldn't be to improve your condition.
- This stuff is all taken very seriously. If your hand or foot was dislocated, **you were not allowed to pour cold water** over it, because cold water might help heal the sprain.
- **For them, the work of God was about the rules of Sabbath-keeping.**

But Jesus says that the work of God is way more than following a set of regulations and rules.

- It was primarily about people. Jesus is saying that people are our business.
- If you want to do the work of God, **start by paying attention to people, start loving people**... especially people whom others ignore.

The religious leaders of Jesus' day were so devoted to showing their righteousness **that they missed the essence of the work of God**, which is love.

- Jesus says, "***A new Commandment I give to you. Love one another.***"
- If YOU want to know what the primary work of God is, it is love.... And **the place where love starts is paying attention.**

And yet, the capacity of human beings to go through their day-to-day without paying attention is staggering.

- And yet, the sad reality is that there are moments and even seasons where I'm **far more like this man's neighbors than I am like Jesus.**
- I'm sure **there are times in my own home** where my own stuff keeps me from really paying attention to what might be burdening Joyce or the girls.
- I **don't like to think that I'm capable of that kind of inattentiveness**, but I am. And, **it's sad, because...**

We live in a world where **people are used to being ignored...** a world where people thirst for the kind of love Jesus showed to this man.

- People **sitting in the seat next to you at school...** those **working in the cubicle** next to yours at work...
- Your **clients**, your **boss**, your **neighbors...** they're all hungry for the kind of love Jesus showed to this man.

And we can "do the works of Him who sent us." We can love like Jesus!

- And how does that start? It starts as we offer others our attention.
- **Jesus pays attention to this man and changes his life.**
- And yet, the Pharisees are so opposed to Jesus that **try to find some way to discredit** what's happening.

There's clearly been a miracle here, but **they don't want to see it.**

- If they would just look! **If they could just see**, they would know just who Jesus was.

- In fact, **even the way in which Jesus healed the blind man** spoke to who He was.

There was a belief throughout the Roman Empire that **saliva contained healing**, medicinal properties.

- In fact, Romans believed that **the gods instructed Emperor Vespasian** to put spit in people's eyes in order to heal them.
- But it wasn't just the Romans who believed that. In fact, Jews of the second Temple period believed that the saliva of a legitimate first-born heir would have healing properties.
- Well, prior to Jesus mixing saliva with the dirt and healing the blind beggar, Jesus was speaking about who He was.
- And so, by healing through saliva, Jesus was attesting to the fact that He was the legitimate first-born heir... the very Son of God.

But over and over again we see in this passage how, even those with physical sight, can remain spiritually blind.

- So, they call in the guy's parents. Take a look at **verse 18**.
- **"The Jews (Pharisees & religious leaders) asked them, 'Is this your son who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?'"**
- The parents' response is very interesting. His parents answered, *"We know this is our son, and that he was born blind. But we do not know how it is that he now sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him. He is of age. He will speak for himself."*

Now, come on! Clearly the mom & dad know Jesus healed their son. So, why would they keep this quiet?

- Well, the next verse tells us why. It says that *"His parents said this, because they were afraid of the Jews."*
- And why? Because they'll stop at nothing to discredit what just happened.

So, the Pharisees called **the now-healed blind guy** back in for a second round of questions.

- Their agenda is pretty clear... to get him to say something that will discredit Jesus and **prove that He has violated Sabbath law.**
- Once he's there with the Pharisees, they start off saying that *"God should get the glory for this, because we know this man Jesus is a sinner."*

But, look at his response: ***"I don't know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know is that though I was blind, now I see."***

- They said to him, *"What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"*
- He answered them, ***"I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?"***

There's a little bit of sarcasm going on there. This guy is a remarkable character for somebody who has been ignored his whole life long.

- **Verse 28:** *"Then they reviled him saying, 'You're his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses. As for this man, we don't know where he comes from.'"*
- Look at this. In **verse 30**, the man answers, ***"Well... that's very strange! He healed my eyes and yet you don't know where he comes from?"***
- Then he says, *"Listen... we know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."*

Apparently, they weren't real receptive to his instruction here. And so, in **verse 34**, they shout out, ***"You were born a total sinner!"*** and then had him thrown out of the synagogue.

- Here's the irony. **In all they're doing**, they think of themselves as being totally devoted to the work of God.

- How incredibly blind they are.

Suddenly, in **verse 35**, Jesus hears that the religious leaders had driven the man out of the synagogue.

- When Jesus found him, He said to the man, *"Do you believe in the Son of man?"*
- He answered, *"Who is he, sir? Tell me so that I may believe in him." Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the One speaking with you is He."*
- I don't know about you, but how powerful is it that Jesus says to this man, blind from birth, **"Now You've seen the Son of Man!"**

In fact, throughout this whole story, **we see this man's understanding of who Jesus is** progressing more and more.

- Back in **verse 11** the man's neighbors asked, *"How is it that he came to see, and who healed him?"*
- His response is, **"The man Jesus."** All he knows about Jesus is His name.

In **verse 17** when the Pharisees are interviewing him for the first time, they say, *"Who is the one who opened your eyes?"*

- The man says, **"He's a Prophet."** There's something special about him. He has some kind of religious authority.
- Then in **verse 33** in the second interview with the religious leaders, he says, *"If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."*
- So, now, He's not only a prophet... but a prophet clearly sent by God.

Finally, after he was thrown out of the synagogue, Jesus tells him, *"You're in the presence of the Son of man."*

- Look at his response in **verse 38**: **"He said, 'Lord, I believe,' and he worshipped him."**
- Not only can he now see with his eyes. But, **having discovered the Savior, he can now see with his heart.**

When the disciples looked at this guy by the side of the road, they found an interesting, theological problem: "*Whose sin caused this man to be born blind?*"

- When his neighbors looked at him, **they saw an eyesore**, a reminder of suffering & poverty that they had learned to overlook.
- When the **Pharisees looked at this man**, they saw a **violated Sabbath**, a threat to their spiritual authority.
- When Jesus looked at this man, **He saw an opportunity to do the work of God**. He saw an **opportunity to love**.

So, let me offer two questions, which I'd like you to reflect on this week. The first is this...

Are you paying attention to God? Are you waiting on Him... are you listening to His voice in your life?

- This is so important... because, **as you cultivate the discipline of "paying attention,"** you'll notice that there are needs all around you.
- Certainly, walking around first century Palestine, **the needs were endless** everywhere Jesus went.

And yet, in **John 5:19**, Jesus said that He "*only does what He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise.*"

- Obviously, you can't respond to every need around you... but, **in paying attention to Him, while being attuned to others,**
- We'll be able to minister in step with the Holy Spirit...
- expressing the love, power, and compassion of Christ.

I was walking down a **fairly busy not-so-nice street** in Paterson some time ago about to have grab lunch with someone.

- In **verse 17 of John 5**, Jesus said that "*the Father is always at work.*" So, I asked the Lord to show me what He was doing.
- I saw this young guy on crutches, with his arm in a sling and bandages around his chest.

So, I stopped and asked him what had happened. I then asked him if I could pray for him... and he said ok.

- Nothing happened, so I asked if I could pray one more time. But this time, he seemed a bit confused.
- I asked him if he feels something... he said, "yes." So, I asked him to move his arm.
- So, he takes his arm out of the cast and starts moving it. No pain.

He turns his torso back and forth... no pain (in spite of broken ribs).

Then he puts the crutches down and walks. He was fine!

- I told him that what Jesus just did in his body, He wants to do in his spirit. And, **in that moment he prayed to receive Christ.**
- -->It's what happens **when we cultivate the practice of paying attention** to the Father and the people around us.

And so, that leads us to my **second question...** As you live out your everyday life, **are you paying attention to people?**

- In the **story of the Good Samaritan**, the Priest and Levite are traveling down this road, no doubt talking about God-stuff!
- They're **so focused on all their spiritual talk** that they choose to ignore the wounded man lying on the side of the road.

But, the Samaritan man... someone whom those religious leaders **would have considered to be spiritually blind...** noticed the man.

- He noticed him... and then tended to Him.
- You see, if you want to do the work of God, start by simply attending to people. **It really is up to us:**
- We can **notice**. We can **see**. We can **feel**. We can **hear**. We can **pray**. We can **care**. We can **serve**. We can extend ourselves
- **OR...** We can **avoid**. We can **withdraw**. We can **hold our hands over our ears**. We can **look the other way**. It's **up to us**.

So, how will we respond? Well, **let's choose to be attuned** to those around us.

- **Let's notice them.** Especially those no one else is paying attention to.
- Because, when you're attuned to those around you...
- what you're saying is *"You're the most important person in my world right now."*
- That's what Jesus does for the **blind man... and that man was never the same** again.
- It's how, as long as there is light, we can be Jesus to the world around us.

Ministry:

In **John 4:35**, Jesus said, *"My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His works."*

- And, in **1 John 4:17**, John says "As Jesus is, so also are we in this world."
- Jesus closes this passage in John 9 saying that "He is the light of the world."
- Well, let's choose to shine the light of His love on those around us.

Maybe you've been **way too focused on yourself** and need God's help seeing beyond yourself.

- Would you ask Him this morning to help you pay more attention to those around you as you live out your everyday life?
- Maybe you are attuned to those around you, **but fear of man** has kept you from ministering to them.
- Maybe you wanted to ask someone struggling at school or work if you could pray for them, but you've been too afraid.
- Will you ask Him this morning for courage... courage to respond to one person this week.