

Matthew 16:1-12 “The Signs of Spiritual Blindness Versus Spiritual Sight”

6.4.17

The title of this morning’s message is “**The Signs of Spiritual Blindness Versus Spiritual Sight.**”

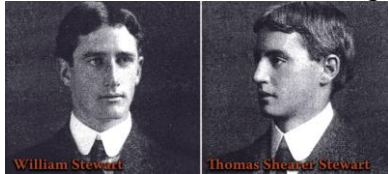
Today I would propose to you the thesis that we live in a culture that is (by and large) becoming more and more spiritually blind. In fact, I could back that up with study after study from the likes of pollsters such as: Pew Research, to Barna Research, to Gallup. Their polls say that more and more people identify with being “spiritual,” but not “religious.” But folks, let’s be perfectly honest...that’s code for: “I’ve made up my own religion that suits me,” and the truth is that those individuals are actually more than likely “spiritually blind” when it comes to Christianity...because Christianity in its essence is not about being religious...it’s about a relationship with Jesus Christ.

The Bible describes the fact that Satan has blinded the minds of unbelievers. See it...

2 Corinthians 4:4

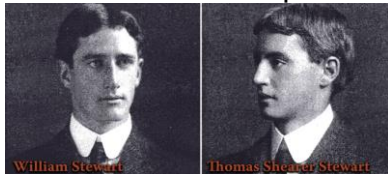
⁴In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Blindness is an awful thing. I read this week about these two young men:



That’s William and Thomas Stewart. They were brothers who lived in Montreal, Canada in the late 1800’s. Thomas, the one on the right, accidentally punctured his right eye when he was 16 years old in 1899. Unfortunately, he lost all of his sight in that eye and the doctors feared that he might also lose the sight in the left eye if they didn’t remove the right eye. So, they operated. Tragically...they took out his good eye (his left one), leaving him totally blind for life. Isn’t that awful! **Aren’t you glad** doctors now mark your body indicating which eye or leg or arm they’re working on.

Well, undaunted in his spirit, because Thomas had always dreamed of becoming a lawyer since he was a little boy, he was determined to still pursue a law degree at McGill University in Montreal. Now, even though he was blind, Thomas graduated with his law degree and graduated number 1 in his class at that. How did he do it? After all, he was blind? Well, his brother William helped him... See the picture again...



William graduated No. 2 in his class was his brother Thomas. You see, William accompanied Thomas to every class, and William read to his blind brother all the necessary books, and wrote for his blind brother, as his “transcriber,” all of the necessary paper. William was his brother’s eyes.

Thomas would eventually marry and he and his wife Margaret would have six children and 16 grandchildren. Thomas died in 1965 at the age of 83. Here’s a picture of Thomas right before he died...



Thomas would write near the end of his life, "Without William I would have never been an attorney and most likely would have never met Margaret and my life would have likely been only a shell of what it turned out to be. I am forever and eternally grateful for my brother William."

William helped Thomas to "see." That's "physical." Jesus helps us to see...that's "spiritual"... You see, 2 Corinthians 4:4 is true. We're born into this world as sinners...blind and Satan wants to keep us that way. Yes, we're all born spiritually blind because and if we don't see and embrace the light of Jesus Christ before we die, we will spend eternity in utter darkness, forever.

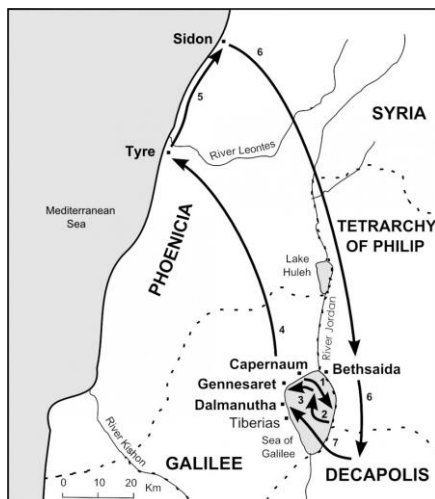
But this morning, you and I have the privilege of hearing about the light of the world, Jesus Christ...the name under heaven by which you and I might be saved from the darkness. My prayer this morning is the same as that of the prophet Isaiah when he was writing to God's people in Isaiah 60...

Isaiah 60:1-2

¹ Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. ² For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you.

Oh how I pray this morning, that each person under the sound of my voice might come to know the light of Jesus before they leave today.

Let's look now this morning at Matthew's account that's about 8-9 months before Jesus' death on the cross. Now, if you've been with us, you'll know that Jesus has been crisscrossing the northern end of Israel and the Gentile regions of Syro-Phoenicia and the Decapolis. Remember our map...



Remember last week, we saw where Jesus was (at the bottom-right) in the Decapolis area and today we'll see Him move back across the Sea of Galilee in a boat and arrive at Magadan...Mark's gospel calls it Dalmanutha and some versions translate the town as: Magdala; and of course, this was the hometown of Mary Magdalene, who would become a disciple of Jesus.

Matthew 15:39

³⁹ And after sending away the crowds, he got into the boat and went to the region of Magadan.

So, Jesus is now back in the land of Israel... In fact, He's only about 15 miles from His hometown of Nazareth. See the map. You'll see Magdala at about 9 o'clock on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee.



Nazareth is just to the bottom-left of Magdala. See it beside the letter "A" in Galilee. And no sooner do Jesus' feet hit the ground in Magdala...that the Pharisees and Sadducees from Jerusalem begin attacking Him again... Watch it...

Matthew 16:1-4

And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. ² He answered them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' ³ And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. ⁴ An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah." So he left them and departed.

That last phrase "So He left them and departed" is an indictment on not only the Pharisees and Sadducees, but also, yet again on some of the people that Jesus knew best. Yes,

Magdala was the closest town along the Sea of Galilee where Jesus could port. It's like the last chance for these people to truly be delivered from their spiritual blindness. Jesus is just months away from His crucifixion and He just had to come back to His home area just one more time. Oh the compassion of Jesus. But Matthew tells us, "He departed"... It's the Greek verb **kataleipo** that's used there. See it.

Left (Greek: kat-a-leip-o)

1. to leave behind, desert
2. to forsake, to leave to one's self a person or thing by ceasing to care for it,
3. to abandon, forsaken, left in a lurch
4. to leave behind, especially of the dying

Depart (Greek: aper-cho-mai)

1. to go away in order to follow someone and their group
 2. to follow as a leader
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Do you understand what Jesus was doing? There's double meaning here. He's rejecting those who have rejected Him, while calling those who would choose to believe in Him. This is the paradox of the spiritually blind, those who would watch Jesus sail off in that boat across the Sea of Galilee, versus those who gained their spiritual sight by believing in Him and getting into the boat and sailing off with Him. What a difference!

And so, just as we saw last week with the people of the Decapolis, Jesus will leave Magdala and never return. This is it...

Can I ask you a question: How many people from Magdala do you think got into the boat with Him? We're not told. I doubt many did. Instead, I believe they stood there on the seashore with their religious leaders and their traditions and their religion of trying to work their way to God as they watched God, in the person of Jesus Christ sail away right before THEIR BLIND EYES. Oh how sad to be that close to Jesus and miss Him! Well...verse 5...

Matthew 16:5

⁵When the disciples reached the other side, they had forgotten to bring any bread.

You might ask, "Where at on the other side of the Sea of Galilee?" Well, we're not told where. But, I believe it was most likely Bethsaida, Julias. See the map. Top-right.



It's the place in the Gospels often referred to as the "desolate place" where Jesus would go to pray. Take a look at this picture...you can see that area behind me...



It's only about five miles from where Jesus had made home-base in Capernaum, where He and the Apostles lived and made resided during the Galilean ministry. Yet, they get there and realize they don't have any bread.

This seems to be a common theme and a common problem, does it not? That's why Jesus has been making so much bread in the last several weeks! He's fed the 5,000 and the 4,000, which was truthfully (counting the women and children) more like 30,000 and 20,000. So, conservatively He's fed over 50,000 people in the last few weeks. So, feeding a rag-tag bunch of disciples is NOT going to be a problem.

But, here again...the disciples aren't thinking on spiritual terms... See Verse 6...

Matthew 16:6-7

⁶ Jesus said to them, "Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." ⁷ And they began discussing it among themselves, saying, "We brought no bread."

When Jesus said, "Watch" for the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees, that word means to "open your eyes...to see clearly." He's wanting them to see spiritually, but all they can talk about is the physical...bread. Did you see in verse 7 they began discussing it among themselves..."We brought no bread." So, apparently, they had a little disciple-committee meeting, what I would call: the "O Ye Of Little Faith Committee," and Jesus knew what they were talking about and He interrupted them...

Matthew 16:8-11

⁸ But Jesus, aware of this, said, "O you of little faith, why are you discussing among yourselves the fact that you have no bread? ⁹ Do you not yet perceive? Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? ¹⁰ Or the seven loaves for the four

thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? ¹¹ How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

Oh Church Family, it's so easy to be like the disciples...just thinking about the physical. I mean, I'm trying to relay to you from God's Word that which is spiritual and many of you are thinking about the physical... It's true...

Some are thinking about what you're going to have for lunch... Others are still tasting the BoJangles sausage biscuit you had a while ago. Others are thinking about that person's new hairdo (you're trying to decide if you like it or not). Others are thinking about the temperature or about what you'll be doing this afternoon. Others are looking at your socks wondering, "Do they match?" All the while Satan laughs and says, "See...they're not listening...they're not seeing..."

It's painfully true, so often people come to church week after week and their lives don't change a bit. Why? Because they're doing an awful lot of thinking about the physical, when they should be thinking about the spiritual.

You see, Church family, it's hard to say these things...but, they need to be said. Oh Church...do we come in here lazy? Is it painful to admit that so often we come in here having never prayed during the week (even once) for this service...for the Praise Team or Pastor Brad or me...MOST OF ALL...sadly...FOR THE LOST? Are we allowing Satan to win and make us blind?

Hey church, do you ever pray for yourself and ask God to make you spiritually attuned to what He would have you to know about yourself. NO. I'm afraid many come to church not thinking about the spiritual at all...not being prepared at all...no preparation...no prayers...no nothing...and week after week we watch that spiritual sailboat with Jesus in it, just float away...and all the things He wanted us to know and understand float off with it!

Jesus said, "How is it that you fail to understand..." Jesus was saying, "How have you missed it guys! You've missed ENTIRELY the point of my trip to Magdala. I went there to give the people another chance. But, they chose the leaven of the Pharisees instead!"

You might ask, "What is their leaven?" It's their false doctrine and their false teaching. It's their traditions and their way of "doing their religion," and the people of Magdala chose them and that "religion" over Jesus. See it again...verse 11...

Matthew 16:11-12

¹¹ How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." ¹² Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Yeah, they finally got it. Matthew records: "Then they understood" ...and he MATTHEW, was one of 'em.

As we close, **it reminds me of the Emmaus travelers**. Do you remember them? After Jesus' resurrection, He encountered two folks who were headed to Emmaus.



Emmaus and Jerusalem were only 7 miles apart, and Luke records in chapter 24 of His gospel that two of the folks who had been at the tomb and seen that it was empty were followers of Jesus from the town of Emmaus. They likely had witnessed the crucifixion and now an empty tomb and NO JESUS. So, confused and bewildered...they're heading back home to Emmaus. And then Jesus shows up right beside of them. I like this depiction of that scene...



He was them, now...but, they couldn't see Him. They didn't recognize Him. It was as if they were blind. They finally get to Emmaus and they politely ask Jesus (again, not knowing it's Him) to come and eat. So, Jesus obliges. And Luke tells us what happens next.

Luke 24:30-31

³⁰When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. ³¹And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight.

I love that phrase: "And their eyes were opened..." You see, once Jesus broke the bread...they saw the nail prints and they could truly see.

I ask you as we close: Can you see today? Yes, you're looking at me with physical eyes. Something that Thomas Stewart in 1899 couldn't do because of the botched eye surgery...until his brother, William helped him "to see" so that he could get his law degree. Well, I'm not here hoping that I can help you to get a law degree. No. I'm here hoping the Holy Spirit will help you see...spiritually...the Lord Jesus Christ, so that you may be delivered from your spiritual blindness.

INVITATION SONG: "Here I Am To Worship"

Communion:

We come to our time of communion this morning and isn't it interesting that the Lord had us talking about bread. I'm never good enough to plan this. We put communion on the calendar and it seems the message always lines up with it. Let me show you how...

We know eventually Jesus would leave Galilee and make his way to Jerusalem, where He would be crucified and die. His body on that Roman cross...would be broken...like bread and his innocent blood would be shed for you and for me.

Jesus would fulfill the righteous requirements on OUR behalf, becoming OUR sacrifice. He would die OUR death, so that we might SPIRITUALLY SEE and repent of our sins and call on His name IN BELIEF and have eternal life. That's what the bread and the juice symbolize...His broken body and His poured out blood.

The bread that we eat today has no leaven in it. Jesus told the disciples to watch out for the leaven of the Pharisees. You now what is leaven...it's yeast. You take a piece of it and place it in lump of dough and a chemical reaction takes place and that dough rises. Just a little leaven can influence and entire lump of dough.

Sometimes leaven is referred to as something held over from the past applied to the present; and that is why, when the nation of Israel left Egypt, they were not allowed to take with them any leaven from Egypt. In essence, God was saying to His people, "Don't you dare take anything out of Egypt-that pagan nation-that might influence your new beginning...cut the cord!" And so, the unleavened bread that you and I will eat in just a moment symbolizes that. It symbolizes the fact that when you accept Jesus Christ as the Lord of your life, you cut the cord and leave your old life and that that old leaven behind.

I'm going to invite you to come forward in a moment (AFTER WE PRAY), but only those who name the name of Jesus should partake. In other words, you should be a born-again, believer and follower of Christ...someone who has left the standing on the seashore of Magdala of your life and you departed with Jesus in the boat, as His disciple, His follower. If you've done that...if you've surrendered your life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, then (according to Scripture) you should partake of this meal. **(Now, children can come with their families...but I would encourage them not to partake if they haven't made a profession of faith.)**

Let us pray...

Now, you'll notice the two side sections...please use the round tables on the ends. For the two center sections, please use the baptistery and the rectangular table. After you have finished, you can leave your cup in the containers provided on the tables. **So, I invite you now to come forward and partake of this Lord's Supper.**

Closing remarks:

Church family, just as we have now participated in this Lord's Supper, believing by faith in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God...may we now leave walking in faith, as followers of Jesus Christ...having spiritual eyes to see, desiring to bring those who are spiritually blind to the Savior, so that they too might see. May the Lord bless you and keep you as you leave today... God bless you...you are dismissed!