

“ONE THING I KNOW”**JOHN 9:1-38**

When Pierre-Paul Thomas was growing up in Montreal, Canada in the 1940s he couldn't play hockey with his brothers and it broke his heart. Thomas was born blind. So for most of his life he could only imagine the world that people often described to him. For years he walked with a white cane to avoid obstacles in front of him. But at the age of sixty-six, Thomas fell down the stairs in an apartment building and fractured the bones of his face. He was rushed to the hospital with severe swelling around his eyes. A team of doctors went to work to repair the bones. Months later he went to be examined by a plastic surgeon for a consultation about repairing his scalp. The surgeon casually asked Thomas, "Oh, while we're at it, do you want us to fix your eyes too?" Thomas didn't understand. Nor did he know how to respond. Not long after that, Thomas had surgery and could truly see for the first time. Suddenly his world consisted of bright colors he had never fathomed before. He spoke of being awestruck by flowers blossoming and trees blooming.

Never being able to see. What's that like? Never being exposed to light. Living your entire life in absolute, total darkness from day one. That was the physical condition of a man Jesus met who had been blind from birth. How would you describe light to someone like that? You could've said it's something bright, but he had no capacity to understand brightness. Like Pierre-Paul Thomas, he couldn't imagine colors. He'd never experienced the magic of a sunset. As a child, he'd reached up and felt the softness of his mother's face, but he didn't know what she looked like.

We're reflecting on five very different Scripture passages that have one thing in common. What's that? One thing. That's what they have in common! The phrase – "one thing." We live in a very busy, very distracted world where we experience information overload every day all day long. We start to yearn for what's simple and clear. Truly, in many areas of life less is more. Less is often more spiritually, too. So, today's "one thing" statement was made by a blind man Jesus healed during His ministry. Responding to Jesus' enemies, he said this about Jesus, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" (Jo. 9:25 NIV) Let's read the whole story just now.

As I reflected on this story about Jesus this week I realized it's a wonderful illustration of humility. And yet the word "humility" or "humble" never appears once. Not even one time. Humility is something we value in other people, but not so much in ourselves. Most of the time, we're so concerned about being disrespected or not getting what we think ought to be coming to us in life, we tend to see humility as a weakness. But humility is absolutely essential to a relationship with God. It's essential to knowing God today, tomorrow, and the day after. The Bible says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (Jam. 4:6 NLT) So, let's see how the story of the blind man whose sight Jesus restored teaches a powerful lesson in humility. For example...

HUMILITY IS RECOGNIZING YOUR NEED FOR GOD.

The blind man is like every person who doesn't have a relationship with Jesus yet. Before Jesus comes into your life, you're spiritually in the dark. You're blind, so to speak, to God's ways and God's truth. The Bible uses that imagery in other places. For example, it says, "Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. They don't understand this message about the glory of Christ." (2 Cor. 4:4 NLT) The blind man could not see. He was blind physically. People without Jesus are blind spiritually. After he encountered Jesus, the blind man was able to see. When people encounter Jesus spiritually, they are given spiritual sight. There's a great irony in this story. The Pharisees – the Jewish religious leaders – could see physically, but they were blind spiritually. The man could not see physically (until Jesus healed him), but his spiritual eyes were also opened to understand who Jesus was. When it comes to knowing God, humility is recognizing – like the blind man and unlike the Pharisees - how much you need God and His help.

Admit it.... Are you a little grossed out by how Jesus healed the blind man? He knelt down and spat in the dirt. Then he mixed his saliva with the earth until he made a kind of muddy paste. Then Jesus applied this mixture to the blind man's eyes and told him to go off to one of Jerusalem's fresh water sources - the pool of Siloam – and wash it off. Yuck! What Jesus did might seem kind of offensive at worst and just outright inadequate at least. But the blind man never complained. He was open to any solution however remote because he recognized the depth of his need. He allowed Jesus to do something that might seem offensive or ridiculous to us. What did he have to lose? Nothing! His reaction was very different than another Bible character who was miraculously healed. Do you remember the story of Naaman, a Syrian general, in the Old Testament? He'd contracted leprosy and came to the prophet, Elijah, for healing. Elijah, who could be a little temperamental to say the least, didn't even bother to come out of his house to greet Naaman. Instead, he told his servant to tell Naaman to go dip himself in the Jordan River seven times. Proud Naaman was deeply offended, but, fortunately, he finally humbled himself and did as Elijah instructed. His leprosy was healed. The blind man wasn't offended by Jesus' method of healing. Because he recognized his need, he obeyed Jesus. That's humility. Much to his joy and amazement, his dark world was flooded with light for the very first time. He could see! "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (Jam. 4:6 NLT)

It occurs to me that many people consider the Bible's explanation of how God saves us as offensive or inadequate, too. The Bible says, "So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it's all nonsense." (1 Cor. 1:23 NLT) Many people find the cross offensive. "What's this about Jesus' blood having to be shed to forgive my sins? Some kind of penalty had to be paid to turn God's anger away from my sin? Really? Why can't He just forgive and forget? How dare you say I'm spiritually and morally unacceptable to God! God is all about love and acceptance, isn't He?" The cross always offends people who've concluded God couldn't possibly ever be or act as a holy Judge. The cross repulses people blind to their own spiritual darkness. Now, other people just think the cross is inadequate. "All I have to do is put my faith in what a man called Jesus did on a cross 2,000 years ago and my life will be

forever changed? Really? That's all?" And yet a countless number of people over hundreds of years have been transformed spiritually by believing and doing exactly that.

Don't ever stop needing God desperately! Stay humble before God! If spiritual vision or insight begins the moment you recognize your desperate need for God, it gets even sharper and clearer as we continue to be humble and needy before God. Make humility habitual. Even as followers of Jesus, it's easy to slip back into a self-sufficient attitude spiritually. We start to trust in our own efforts, our own wisdom, and not lean completely upon Jesus. Strange as it may seem, God often uses adversity – that's true in my life – to help us keep on recognizing our desperate need for God every day.

Disappointments, hard decisions, financial instability, misunderstandings with other people, poor health – they can all be used by God to help us recognize our need for Him. Charles Spurgeon, a great Baptist preacher in the 1800s, put it like this, "It is not our littleness that hinders Christ, but our bigness. It is not our weakness that hinders Christ; it is our strength. It is not our darkness that hinders Christ; it is our supposed light that holds back His hand." Humility! I see another truth about humility in our story.

HUMILITY IS ADMITTING YOUR IGNORANCE OF GOD.

It takes humility to admit your ignorance. That's why so many of us find it so hard to do! The Pharisees could never admit their ignorance. The Pharisees were the intelligentsia of their day – forever reading and studying the Old Testament and its interpretation by many scholars over hundreds of years. They were the spiritual leaders of the day. They also had considerable power in Jewish society. Our story revealed they could cut off fellow Jews from the synagogue which was the spiritual and social center of the community. That's why the blind man's parents were so wishy-washy in their responses to the Pharisees' questions. If you were excommunicated from the synagogue, your life got instantly a whole lot more difficult.

When the blind man was healed by Jesus, he had every reason to expect lots of rejoicing and thanksgiving with his friends and family. It wasn't to be. The Pharisees didn't object to the healing itself. They just had a big problem with the day of the week Jesus decided to perform the miracle. They believed performing a miracle was a serious violation of the Old Testament Law which forbids any sort of work on the day of rest – the Sabbath Day. Actually, Jesus didn't break any law written down in the actual Old Testament Scriptures. Instead, He violated various scholarly interpretations and traditions that had grown up over the years. The Pharisees are typical of some people in every generation – even some Christians – who have a corner on spirituality and what's right and wrong. They're quick to condemn other people who don't practice their faith in exactly the same way they do. Just a passing thought right here. Before you criticize something a fellow Christian does or does not do, make sure you can find that behavior denounced in the Bible itself. Chapter and verse, please. We all stand under the Word of God, but nobody has to live according to your opinions or mine.

Here's a remarkable and ironic contrast. On the one hand, the Pharisees had supreme self-confidence in their own knowledge about God and what pleased God. Pride. On

the other hand, the blind man had no problem admitting his ignorance about just about everything. Humility. The more the Pharisees claimed to know spiritual truth, the more ignorant they appeared to be about what really mattered. The more the blind man admitted his ignorance, the wiser he appeared to be. What were the Pharisees saying? “We know Jesus is not from God. We know this because He doesn’t observe the Sabbath appropriately. That proves Jesus is a sinner – someone God can’t work in or through. We know God spoke through our ancestor, Moses, but we don’t even know where this Jesus is from.” They claimed to know a lot, but they were ignorant of what mattered most. They had no idea who they were dealing with in Jesus. They refused to consider the possibility that God was doing something new and different in Jesus. From willful, proud ignorance about Jesus, it was a short trip to hardened unbelief in Jesus.

But the blind man was quick to admit his own ignorance. His friends asked him who healed him. “I don’t know.” When the Pharisees said they knew Jesus was a sinner, the blind man replied, “Whether he’s a sinner or not, I don’t know.” Then, when Jesus came to Him and asked, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” he replied, “Who is he? Tell me so I can believe in Him.” He was ignorant, but he was humble enough to admit his ignorance. His humility allowed God to give him spiritual insight into who Jesus was. Right after his sight was restored, he referred to Jesus as “the man they call Jesus.” Then, when the Pharisees questioned him, he called Jesus “a prophet.” He was beginning to recognize Jesus was unique and special. Still later – in his final confrontation with the Pharisees - he said to them, “Look, if this man were not from God, he couldn’t do anything miraculous.” In our final glimpse of this man, he fully recognized who was standing before him face to face. This was the Messiah – the anointed One sent from God. What did the formerly blind man say and do? ““Yes, Lord, I believe!”” the man said. And he worshiped Jesus.” (Jo. 9:38 NLT)

What’s the point? Humility led to greater and more accurate knowledge about Jesus. Ironically, real spiritual insight and vision begins the moment you and I have the humility to admit our spiritual ignorance and darkness. That’s when God can begin to fill your life with the light of spiritual truth. Humbly admitting our ignorance allows God the opportunity to open our eyes. Proudly insisting our knowledge about God is complete only obscures our spiritual vision. Why don’t some followers of Jesus continue to read and study the Bible all of their lives? Often there’s an assumption that you’ve heard it all or you’ve learned enough. Really? This side of Heaven, we can never assume we’ve learned everything about God there is to know or that Scripture can no longer provide fresh, exciting insights into who God is. Show me a Christian who has no interest in increasing his or her knowledge of God, and I’ll show you a follower of Jesus who’s full of prideful ignorance. But show me a Christian who’s still hungry to know more about God and His Word even after years of study, reflection, and discussion, and I’ll show you a follower of Jesus who’s both humble and whose knowledge of God is becoming profound. What else does humility look like? Here’s what I see.

HUMILITY IS HOLDING ON TO WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT GOD.

“A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. ‘Give glory to God by telling the truth,’ they said. (That was their way of saying, “Now tell the truth, the whole

truth, and nothing but the truth.”) ‘We know this man is a sinner.’ He replied, ‘Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!’” (Jo. 9:24-25 NIV) The blind man who could now see refused to debate theological fine points with the Pharisees. He just shared what he had personally experienced. He now could see. He was no longer blind. That much was certain and beyond dispute. He held on to that reality with an iron fist. His attitude reminds me of a comment by Josh Billings, a humorist, who once said, “I’d rather know a few things for certain than be sure of a lot of things that ain’t so.”

Here’s yet another irony. The formerly blind man – who had no theological training – was astute enough to recognize that the Pharisees’ theology had holes in it big enough to drive a semi-truck through it. The Pharisees said much about what they supposedly knew. They knew this and they knew that, but they didn’t know where Jesus came from or who He was. The blind man says, “‘Why, that’s very strange! He healed my eyes, and yet you don’t know where he comes from? We know that God doesn’t listen to sinners, but he is ready to hear those who worship him and do his will. Ever since the world began, no one has been able to open the eyes of someone born blind. If this man were not from God, he couldn’t have done it.’” (Jo. 9:30-33 NLT) Oh, the Pharisees did not care for that completely true and unavoidable conclusion!

Do you know why many Christians are scared to death by the word “evangelism”? Too many of us think that sharing the story about Jesus with someone else means memorizing and delivering an hour long theological lecture. Wrong! It’s simply sharing with other people how Jesus has changed your life. “One thing I know.” Evangelism isn’t about encyclopedic knowledge of Jesus, but my personal experience of Jesus. You might be someone who finds it difficult to provide a theologically precise and perfect description of who Jesus is; nevertheless, you can give a strong personal witness how Jesus has changed your life. The blind man didn’t know everything about Jesus, but what he did know he was completely certain of: “One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!” Humility holds on to what we know about God.

Can you say that this morning? What do you know about Jesus that nothing can shake? You’re certain of it. There will come times in our lives when we will need to hold on tightly to what we know for certain about God. The probing questions of a non-Christian friend... some setback in life for which we have no explanation... a failure in life that makes us question if God will love or accept us. Like the blind man Jesus healed, can you say, “One thing I know? I’m completely certain. This is something no one can talk me out of. When everything else fails, I’ll still have this truth to hold on to.”

Is there a “one thing” in your life? “Rick, one thing I know, Jesus forgave all my sins. All the guilt is gone. One thing I know, Jesus put my life back together again after absolute chaos. One thing I know, Jesus gave my life a purpose it never had before. One thing I know, Jesus healed my marriage. One thing I know, Jesus kept me together and moving forward after my marriage failed. One thing I know, Jesus healed my body. One thing I know, Jesus delivered me from alcohol, from drugs, from pornography. One thing I know, Jesus gave me a peace beyond comprehension when my loved one died.

One thing I know, Jesus gave me the strength to loose the chains of resentment and bitterness that had my life all bound up. One thing I know, Jesus got us through those rough teenage years with my kids. One thing I know, Jesus empowered me to forgive someone I could never forgive in my own strength.” Humility before God and certainty about what God has done in your life can go hand in hand. That’s your witness. That’s your testimony. That’s what you can tell non-believers Jesus has done for you. They may argue with you about the existence of God, the deity of Jesus, or the truthfulness of the resurrection. But what can they really say against how Jesus has forever changed your life? Nothing. “One thing I know.”

On January 12, 2002, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers suffered a crushing 31-9 loss to the Philadelphia Eagles in the National Football League playoffs. Two days later, Head Coach Tony Dungy was fired. He was now a former head coach. He thought his career as a coach was over. While being a committed Christian, it was hard to remember God's promise from Romans 8:28 that all things work together for good to those who love Him. But Tony tried to remember the promise that despite all of our troubles, God will never abandon us. He soon discovered football was still in God's plans for him. That very same year, Dungy took over as coach of the Indianapolis Colts.

Then, tragedy struck again. In late 2005, as the Colts charged toward the postseason, Tony and his family experienced every parent's worst nightmare. His oldest son, James, 18, took his own life in a Tampa apartment. He left no suicide note. Although the reasons for his son's suicide remain unknown, Dungy says that the experience only reinforces his belief that life has its peaks and valleys. But God is there—always. On February 4, 2007, Tony Dungy celebrated what had eluded him for so many years before. The Colts defeated the Chicago Bears in Super Bowl XLI. Dungy became the first African American head coach to win the legendary NFL championship game.

Winning a Super Bowl and losing a child are on opposite extremes of the emotional scale. But Tony Dungy thinks both events have had a positive effect on his life. "Both of these events have given me the opportunity to grow in my faith. I have been touched by so many people who have reached out to me to express their own experiences, their triumphs as well as their tragedies. And because of my experiences, I have been able to help them. I can tell them in no uncertain terms that despite these ups and downs, God is with us. God is for us. He won't ever abandon us."

In other words, “one thing I know.” What’s God done for you? In both the good and the bad of life? That’s your testimony. That’s your witness. Like the blind man whose sight Jesus restored, look for any and every opportunity to share it with others. Humility is all about recognizing your need for God. Humility is all about admitting your ignorance of God. But humility is also all about holding on to what you know about God and sharing it with any and all who will listen.