

A man born blind receives sight

1 Samuel 16:1–13

Psalm 23

Ephesians 5:8–14

John 9:1–41

Text: John 9:5-7

As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.’ When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, saying to him, ‘Go, wash in the pool of Siloam’ (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

Introduction

Sonny Bunch, a Washington Post contributing columnist, is a member of the Washington Area Film Critics Association. In his January 2023 article titled [Hollywood's anti-human agenda](#) he began by saying that “Human exploration is out. Human exhaustion is in. Films once championed the idea of discovery and expansion. But pop culture has become too skeptical and depressed about the future of humanity to envision bold moves into the unknown.” After probing his thesis in current Hollywood movies he concluded by saying, “... our broader cultural exhaustion is real, and worrisome. As the characters in one James Cameron universe famously put it, “There’s no fate but what we make for ourselves.” If the stories we tell ourselves are a window into the future we hope to make, what does it say about humanity’s hopes that we are usually the villains of those stories?”

Hollywood is not alone. Adam Kirsch teaches at Columbia University and published a new book, *The Revolt Against Humanity: Imagining a Future Without Us*. In a January 2023 [article](#) he wrote, “From Silicon Valley boardrooms to rural communes to academic philosophy departments, a seemingly inconceivable idea is being seriously discussed: that the end of humanity’s reign on Earth is imminent, and that we should welcome it.” In his article he details two converging ideas, an antihumanism that says that our climate destruction has doomed humanity and we should welcome our extinction, and also a transhumanism that believes that genetic engineering and artificial intelligence will lead to new forms of life superior to humans.

1. Not a very rosy picture of humanity is it? And I know you didn’t come to church for an extra helping of gloom and doom. I found, as I read these articles, that the

authors were able to put a name on this trend that runs through our culture; anti-human. I am grateful for those who can name things in this way. The idea that humans are the problem for planet earth is in the background of much of the current environmental movement. Humans are viewed and spoken of by many as a parasite in an otherwise beautiful world. It seems, to me, a very depressing message for young people today.

If this general pessimism about humanity is at the core of culture, I wonder if, when people with this cultural mindset hear the gospel, do they hear it as anti-human? Perhaps as preachers have stood against certain cultural trends the message heard is that God is anti-human. I can't sugar-coat the gospel assertion that God has a bone to pick with us humans; God indeed has something against us. But is that the same thing as saying that God is anti-human? The Christian proclamation is that God has come among us in Jesus of Nazareth; we call this the incarnation and it is the foundation of all that Christianity says about God. Now, if God has taken on human form—meaning that the human is the fit vehicle for God in all his perfections—then God must consider being human to be a good thing. What God has against us is that we humans are sinners, have turned away from him, have told him to get lost. God isn't against us as humans—what he has against us is our unbelief.

The message of the gospel is that to see Jesus is to see God; to see what Jesus does is to see what God does. We read of how Jesus gave sight to a man born blind. If, as Christians say, this is God in action, what does the fact that Jesus gives this man his sight tell us about God's regard of the human person? As a blind man he was reduced to begging in his world. Does this healing not tell you—just in the fact that the man's sight was restored—that God thinks being human is a good thing? If God were anti-human would Jesus have bothered to give this man his sight?

In fact far from being anti-human, the gospel asserts that God purposed from the foundation of the world to be for the human; to have a people for himself and to do so for eternity. God comes among us in Jesus to redeem and restore humans to all that God had in mind in creating human life. The scriptural picture of humanity stands in stark contrast to ideologies that see humans becoming extinct or obsolete. In the gospel, eternal life is the gift of God in his saving purposes for us humans. For Christians, the best is always yet to come—we are ever looking forward.

2. Today we read the captivating story of how David was chosen by God to be king in Israel. The story has the intrigue of an epic drama. The prophet Samuel had just informed the then King Saul that 'because Saul rejected the word of the God, God

has rejected Saul from being King.’ Samuel didn’t see Saul again until the day of his death, and he grieved over Saul. But now God is calling Samuel to anoint a new king whom God has chosen from among the sons of a man named Jesse who lives in Bethlehem. Of course Samuel can’t announce this publicly because Saul will hear about it and put Samuel’s life in danger. This has all the components for a good movie made for livestreaming service.

Don’t we love stories where the person easily overlooked becomes the hero? Somehow we like it when underdogs triumph. Maybe because we know personally the pain of being overlooked and not the one chosen. In the story Samuel sees the eldest son Eliab and thought, ‘this boy has the bearings of King! Surely the Lord’s anointed is now before the Lord! ‘ No, God didn’t choose him. So each of seven sons was brought before Samuel and each one in succession was not the one the Lord had in mind. Finally, Samuel asks Jesse if he has more sons. As a matter of fact my youngest is out looking after the sheep. Clearly David had the lowest job within the family business—shepherds weren’t exactly an esteemed lot. You know how the youngest in the family can end up with the menial tasks especially if the older siblings get their way. Or maybe, each son had, in turn, been shepherd but graduated and now it was David’s turn.

Samuel learned an important lesson that day. “But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, ... for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.’ Again, I ask, what does this story tell us about God and his regard for humans and about our humanity?

It tells me that my humanity is much deeper than my physical attributes. As a human, I am never a human without my body, yet am more than only these material aspects as foundational as they are. God sees in my heart and knows all about me. It seems to me that one of the heart cries of people today is to be known. Technology has connected us as never before but we are ever so lonely, isolated. We craft online presences but is this who we really are? You post something important to you and an array of hateful responses leaves you hurting and wounded. You wonder how you could have been so misunderstood. According to this story of David, God knows you completely; knows your heart and what he has in mind for you to. Will we trust him and pray for his leading?

Now, I know what God says through the prophet Jeremiah (17:9), “The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse—who can understand it?” Jesus said that “it is from within the human heart that evil intentions come.” (Mark 7:21) Indeed

David was a sinner like the rest of us who have this heart problem. Even so, in God's great mercy this does not mean we are lost causes. In the Bible stories we learn that David has a great passion for justice; a passion that God works with in David's life for the leadership God called David to fulfil. Recall that one day Jesus said to his disciples, "if you, evil as you are, know how to give good gifts to your children." You notice this heart problem was no barrier to serving Jesus. God sees our hearts and never throws us on the trash heap, but desires to draw from our hearts the good he purposes for us.

Again I note God's abiding regard for us humans. He doesn't run rough shod over us but calls from us that we might be the human God had in mind when creating us. I wonder if David, while sitting with the sheep that day, thought he had what it took to be a king or did God see things in him he never knew about himself. What we are told is that on that day when David submitted to being anointed by Samuel, the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David; the same Spirit our Lord gives to any who believe in him.

3. In the story of the healing of this man born blind, does it surprise you that not everyone was happy for the man. A blind beggar is given a priceless gift—his sight! You would think that people would be cheering. At cancer treatment clinics there is a common practice; a patient rings a bell on the completion of treatments indicating that they are one step closer to being cancer free. It is intended to cheer people on. It is generally considered good news when we read of some breakthrough in treatment of disease or impairment.

The negative reaction was to Jesus in particular. "We know this man (Jesus) is a sinner!", thundered some among the religious authorities. The problem was that if they acknowledged that Jesus healed this man they would have to acknowledge that he came from God. No one else could do this—give a man his natural sight that he never had. Jesus made this comment about their spiritual blindness, "But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."

'We know', 'we see.' The same things are said of Jesus today. 'We know that these Bible stories are mythical, told in order to make the hero look good.' 'We see that science, technology and medicine can conquer disease and with enough resources and ingenuity can make illness a thing of the past.' Is it possible that our 'knowing' and 'seeing' blinds us to the truth of our lives? Many people in this story just flat out denied that the man was healed—such was their vitriol towards Jesus. But there the man stands, claiming for any who would listen, "One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.'

4. The point the Apostle John makes in all these stories is to invite people to believe in Jesus. The question on the minds of many today is, if I trust Jesus, is he good? And when you read this story you see that the blind man's life was immediately plunged into turmoil after Jesus healed him. Is trusting Jesus good? People can see that the church is not highly regarded in society if regarded at all. The questions many have is about the goodness of God.

I note with you God's initiative in both the story of David and the man born blind. David did not ask to be anointed king and the blind man did not ask to be healed. The picture painted is that God approaches us because he wants to do good for us. In both stories the individuals whom God approaches needed to say yes. David knelt before Samuel and agreed to be anointed. The blind man went and washed in the pool as he was instructed. They both discover that God is good.

And the part of the story of the blind man I love is this: when we are told that the man was driven out of the synagogue and ostracised in his own community, Jesus went and found him. Jesus is ever coming to us to nurture our faith amidst the blows of life. Jesus asks him, do you believe in the Son of Man? And after clarifying that Jesus meant himself, the man said, "Lord, I believe." If you had gone through this man's turmoil; instead of people rejoicing that you had your sight they sent you packing; would you be saying to Jesus, "Lord. I believe" or 'leave me alone?' There must have been something compelling about Jesus, something so beautiful and good, that the man could say nothing else except, "Lord, I believe."

Conclusion

At the beginning of this message I read from a movie critic who cited a movie character who said, "There's no fate but what we make for ourselves." Is this true? We make our own fate? The gospel witnesses that our world is the theatre of God's activity; in love God makes incursion into our lives to make himself known so that he might redeem our lives for his glory that is always for our good. May we respond as this blind man. "Lord, I believe."