

53 – Loyalty

John 9:8-38

It's not easy to define "loyalty." Try it. Nor is it easy to explain why some people are loyal and some are not. In fact that's one of the most puzzling aspects about loyalty. Sometimes it's those to whom we give the most who abandon us the quickest. People we had every right to expect would be loyal to us, weren't. But then there are those who turn out to be loyal from whom we would never have anticipated such a gift. Loyalty seems to rise up from some place deep inside a person, and I doubt that most people could explain why they were loyal if asked. Something inside the heart decides to stay, to stand, to love, to protect, regardless of the cost.

Loyalty isn't a quality that can stand alone. It requires courage; it requires love, and it requires humility. Without courage it won't last; without love it won't start, and without humility it would never find anyone worthy of such commitment. It's thankfulness at a very deep level. We become so thankful to a person or a family or a community or a nation that a strong bond is formed; a silent vow is taken. We decide that we are one with that person or family or community or nation.

That's why loyalty is the key virtue in marriage. Without it love can't exist. Love, real love, doesn't come first; loyalty does. Then in the safety of loyalty we learn to love. In the Bible God compares His relationship with us to a marriage and disloyalty to Him as adultery. Above all else, He asks us to be loyal to Him, just as He has been loyal to us. We are to have no other gods before Him. It's heartbreaking to watch when people come to God, receive His help and then dispose of Him when they feel they no longer need Him.

Staying loyal requires many decisions, not one, because there is something in this world that hates loyalty. It repeatedly attacks it wherever it finds it. But to those who resist those attacks, to those who choose to stay, to stand, to love, to protect, it provides the foundation upon which true, lasting relationship can be built. In the passage we'll study today, we'll see loyalty rise up in a man who encountered Jesus.

The miracle (vs6-7)

• DBS (Fri-Sat)

After the miracle (vs8-38)

His neighbors and those who knew him as a beggar were divided. Some did not believe a miracle had occurred. Apparently they suspected fraud. They said this person who could see was someone who merely looked like that beggar, to which the man kept saying, "It's me!" Others recognized him and realized that a miracle must have happened. Everyone asked how, and he replied that a man named Jesus made clay, put it on his eyes and then told him to go to the Pool of Siloam and wash. He did what he was instructed to do and came back seeing. They then asked him where Jesus was, but he didn't know. Apparently they were troubled by the thought that Jesus had made clay and performed a miracle on the Sabbath, so they led him to the Pharisees for questioning. They would let religious scholars, who were more knowledgeable in these matters, determine whether or not Jesus had violated a commandment.

The Pharisees began by asking the man the same question the neighbors had asked: How was he able to see? He answered, "He put clay on my eyes. I washed and I see" (literal). Again as had happened to the neighbors, these scholars were divided. Some, but not all, decided the miracle could not be from God because, in their judgment, Jesus had violated the command to rest on the Sabbath. Others asked how it was possible for a sinful man to perform such a miracle. It was obvious to them that only God could have done such a wonder. So a debate broke out between the two sides, and at some point they turned to the man and asked what He thought of Jesus. He said Jesus was a prophet, which at that point in time was the best he knew.

Then it appears that members of the Sanhedrin became involved because John refers to the "Jews," which was a term used especially for those religious leaders. They summoned his parents to what now had become a formal hearing. They asked them to testify if this, indeed, was their son. Was this the man who had been born blind? Yes, or no! They were very careful in their answer. They did not want to say anything more than was absolutely necessary because these leaders had publicly threatened to make an outcast of anyone who dared to say Jesus was the Messiah. They did admit, "This is our son," but were careful to say, "We don't know how his eyes were opened." Then, essentially, they backed away and left their son on his own. They said, "He's an adult; ask him." They had identified him as their son and acknowledged that he could see, but they refused to comment on Jesus.

Finally, the leaders summoned the man himself. They didn't start the examination by asking what happened, because in their minds the verdict was already decided. They started by challenging him to renounce Jesus as a sinner. They wanted him to testify that Jesus had nothing to do with the miracle that God had done, a miracle in spite of that wicked man. They may have suggested that God was using Jesus to test Israel to see if the nation would follow after a false teacher. The man refused to cooperate. He said he didn't know if Jesus was a sinner, but he did know he could see. Then probably with the hope of discovering some sort of wrong action which Jesus had done during the miracle that might indicate demonic involvement, they asked him again to tell them how he had received his sight.



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At some point during the questioning, the man made a decision to put himself at risk. He recognized the ugly spirit in which this investigation was being conducted and decided to stand with Jesus. He aggressively turned on his interrogators and said, "I already told you, and you didn't listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also [like I have] want to become His disciples?" That made them furious, and they began to insult him. They said, "You're His disciple, but we're Moses' disciples. We know God spoke to Moses, but we don't know where He's from or what power He uses" (paraphrase). At that the man dropped all caution and openly challenged the foolishness of their reasoning. He said, "Well this is a marvelous thing, that you don't know whether He's from God or not, but He opened my eyes; and we know God doesn't listen to sinners, but if anyone fears God and does His will He hears that person. From the beginning [of human history] no one has ever heard of someone opening the eyes of a person born blind. If this Man was not from God He could do nothing!" (paraphrase). They couldn't argue with his logic. So they turned their attack on the man himself, and as they did so, their deep religious beliefs were exposed. Someone must have sinned for a baby to be born blind, so they said, "You were born completely (wholly) in sins, and do you teach us?" (literal). And then John says "they cast him out" (v34), which was a very serious punishment. Until he repented he would be treated like a "dead man," allowed only to buy the bare necessities of life (Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, E.R. Herrick and Co., Vol 2, p.184).

When Jesus heard what they did to him, He knew the man had refused to betray Him, so He found him and asked a very spiritual question, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" (literal). The man replied, "Who is He, sir, so that I may believe in Him?" Then Jesus revealed that He was that amazing Person Daniel saw in a vision to whom God gave authority over all the kingdoms of the earth (Da 7:13-14). He said, "You have seen Him, and He is the One who is speaking to you" (literal). And the man confessed, "I believe Lord!" and worshipped Him.

How people responded

His neighbors suspected fraud (v9); the Pharisees labeled Jesus a sinner (v16); the religious leaders threatened to expel him (v22), and his parents were disloyal to him (vs20-21, 23). But the man himself chose to be loyal to Jesus, and when Jesus heard that, He found him and gave him eternal life.

A loyal heart

We have just watched a man refuse to denounce the person who gave him the gift of sight. Even when he didn't really know who Jesus was, he became loyal to Him. He would not separate himself from someone so kind; he would not deny a miracle so clearly from God. He would not call what was good, evil, even if it meant losing everything.

That miracle revealed a heart not only ready to believe but ready to stand beside Jesus and bear His reproach, ready to be His disciple. The author of Hebrews described such loyalty this way:

"For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest [as an offering] for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore, Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate. So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking [the city] which is to come" (Heb 13:11-14).

The frustration of being blind must have been miserable at times. But apparently in that man, suffering deepened his longing for eternal life. Suffering causes some people to grow bitter toward God but drives others to cling more firmly to His promises of a future without suffering. Suffering can loosen our grip on this world and give us the eyes to "see" the next.

Deeply thankful

What powerful work has God done in your life? What has He done that you know He did? Have people criticized you or mocked you for it? Do you live among neighbors, religious leaders, parents, family members, even courts or employers who demand that you renounce what God has done in your life? If so, have you remained loyal, or have you been tempted to cave in to the pressure? Loyalty to Jesus is a choice, a really deep choice, that may well cost a true disciple everything, but it provides the only foundation upon which a true, lasting relationship with Jesus can be built.

Questions

- 1) Has God done miracles in your life that you know were from Him? Name one. What would you say to someone who asked you to deny that God did that for you?
- 2) Do you have a loyal friend? What has that person done that shows you that he or she is committed to you? Are you loyal to someone? Who? What do you do that shows your loyalty?