

This morning we're continuing our series looking at the ministry of Jesus and his impact upon ordinary men and women.

The passage that Lucy read, shows us what happened when two men turned 'a distant theoretical understanding of God' into 'a personal encounter with Jesus' – it turned their world upside down – and the right way up.

The passage is about what happens when religion ceases to be something "out there" and becomes something in here, an inner reality, which breaks into our personal world and changes us.

In Matthew 9, in just 4 short verses, we see two blind men undertake a journey of faith that takes them from darkness to light.

In just 4 verses these two men give us a lesson in **the anatomy of faith**.

I don't know if you've seen that TV programme "Inside Nature's Giants". It's where experts in anatomy decide to hack to pieces large animals like sharks and pythons and lions to examine how they do the incredible stuff that they do.

My family always seem to want to watch it when I am late homing and I'm eating my supper! It's all pretty gruesome. I have to close my eyes while I swallow – which incidentally is exactly what a Great White Shark does when it eats...

These 4 verses, if we dissect them, show us how a living faith works:
at its core, is a Belief about the possibility of a relationship with a God
its backbone is an Encounter with Jesus which meets our needs
the bit we see is the difference the Spirit makes in our life.

Belief, Encounter, Life.

This is the journey these two men make, and if we would follow them, then it can be our journey too.
Belief, Encounter and Life – that is what we will discover this morning.

So would you turn with me to Matthew Chapter 9v27, p974 of your pew Bibles, and we'll begin by seeing that these two men believed...

1. They Believed something about themselves and something about Jesus.

v27 says "as Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him"

These two people knew they were blind.

Now that's obvious, but the implications are important...

For because they were blind

they would have been cut-off from the Temple (for no disabled people were allowed in the Temple); and they may well have been confused about God (why did you allow this to happen to me?); and they would have been poor (with no means of earning aliving); and they would have relied on friends and family for direction, food and shelter.

These people knew, believed, there was something wrong... they were blind, and this blindness was the cause of all their spiritual and material needs.

They also believed something about Jesus too – in v26 we are told that *“news of the things he did spread through all the region”*

They had heard about Jesus

They had heard that:

he was the one who healed that woman when she touched him

he was the one who raised the dead daughter of a Rich Ruler

he was the one who healed a paralytic.

They heard the stories about Jesus and they must have believed *something* about him.

They called him v27 *“the Son of David”*

“Son of David” it’s a formal title -

They couldn’t have used anything else really, because they didn’t know Jesus as a friend.

They knew him as a distant religious figure who seemed to be able to change lives.

They’d heard other people’s stories about him –

but they didn’t know him for themselves .

So they believed some things...

1) They knew they were blind, 2) they believed Jesus could help...

and thirdly...

they turned this belief into action.

They didn’t just sit there letting Jesus pass by saying *“well, if he wanted to heal us then he could have done so – after all here we are!”*,

They didn’t say *“well if Jesus wants us to follow him then he’s gonna have to come and prove himself to us!”*

They didn’t just shout once and then give up! *“They said ‘stuff the embarrassment’ we’re just going to keep calling out even if he doesn’t stop*

Even though they were blind, they started to follow Jesus.

- I have no idea how difficult this must have been for them!

Did they persuade their friends to help them? (*“Quick follow that Rabbi”*),

Did they attempt to run to keep up?

I don’t know.

But they turned their belief into action and it was a pretty courageous thing to do!

Even when Jesus went into a house and shut the door behind him – they didn’t give up!

Here is the anatomy of belief that leads to an encounter with the living God...

- They knew they were blind, they knew there was a whole dimension to their lives missing;
- They believed that Jesus was their best hope to open their eyes; and
- They did something about it

This is how it must be for you and me,

We need to recognise that is something wrong:

something is wrong with the world, and something is wrong with ourselves.

Why is their so much suffering?,

why is there so much injustice?,
how come people seem to get away with it?
There is something wrong in this world?

But also

If I am made by God and not simply a collection of random atoms – then why does God seem so far away?
If I have been made to know God – then why can't I see him?
If I desire to be good (and I do) – then how come I cannot be!

There is something wrong here (with me and the world!)
Like the men in Matthew, this is the first step in a belief that leads to a living encounter with God.
There is something wrong with me and the world!
Do you recognise this?

The second step is to recognise that there is something about Jesus that is totally different,
to listen to the stories of people who have met him
to see how he has changed their lives
to understand that they believe they have found what life is all about!
How he has given them freedom and purpose and hope – and so much more...!

Sure you don't know him yet,
sure he is only a distant religious figure,
but the second step, that leads to an encounter with God, is to believe that Jesus will make sense of this world and show us what life is all about ...

The third step is to do something about it!
Not to say, *"well if Jesus wants me then he should come and get me"*,
Not to say *"if he wants me to follow him then he needs to prove himself to me"*
Not to say *"well I'll give it a half-hearted attempt"*

No, to do something about it means:
taking a risk, saying 'stuff the embarrassment', saying 'I don't care how difficult it is' saying "I won't even be put off if God seems to be playing hard to get"
I am going to pursue him –
I am going to get him alone and see if he will have mercy on me!

It is that level of action that is needed if we are ever to encounter the living God
To keep pursuing him and to ask him to have mercy.
Have you/Will you do that?

This is the core to an anatomy of faith.
The second part, the backbone, is the

2. Encounter with Jesus

v28 *"the blind men came to him"*

The encounter with Jesus was personal,
it was not academic, or theoretical, or forensic to satisfy their intellect.
It was personal –

The distraction of the crowd was shut out and
They began a personal conversation with Jesus.
They got themselves in a place where they could hear what God was saying to them.

v28 and he asked them 'do you believe that I am able to do this'...

Now, why did he ask them this?
They knew what they believed,
He knew what they believed,
They may even have known that he knew, that they knew, what they believed...
so why ask?

Jesus gets them to voice their belief.
This is really important for it becomes the turning point in their lives.
He gets them to speak it out, to mark their belief by voicing it.
We are witnessing a 'right of passage'.
They say v28 "*Yes, Lord*"

Note, no longer 'Son of David', but now 'Lord'
The word 'Lord' in the Greek is '*Kurios*' is means Master and Friend combined.

No longer is Jesus a distant titled figure,
In this room, in this encounter, in this conversation: he is (for the first time) Lord.
Master - the one calling the shots; and
Friend - the one alongside, and
And in that moment, when they acknowledge that
Jesus touches their eyes and their sight is restored.

This is the most important thing we can learn from this passage.
It is only once they speak about, when they put their trust in the one they call LORD
that they encounter the transforming touch of God, and see.

For them it was not "seeing is believing", but "believing is seeing".
And the touch of God changed their life.

This is how it works for us:
to encounter God it needs to be personal.
We will never encounter God in the merely academic or the theoretical or in argument for arguments sake.
It has to be personal.

God will sit under nobody's microscope - and to think that he will is breath-taking arrogance.
In our encounter with God we need to be clear "who is God" and "who is the Creature".
We need to know "who is doing who the favour here".
Sometimes people treat God as if they would be doing him a great favour if they were to deign to follow him.
If God is God, then that is breath-taking arrogance!

An encounter with God is born out of an honest conversation between us and God.
A speaking out of our needs and a listening from our heart

And it always culminates in the question “*Do you believe I am able to do this for you*”

Do you believe that I have come to give you life in all its fullness?,
Do you believe that I can show you why you were made?,
Do you believe I can open your eyes?
Do you believe that I can be trusted?
Do you believe that I am Master and Friend?

And it is when we say, out loud, “Yes Lord” that we encounter his touch.

Yes Lord – you are one will call the shots in my life
Yes Lord – you are the Friend who I will trust.

It is when we turn Jesus turns from being a Label (Son of David) to Lord that we experience the touch of God and we see.

For, for us – just as for them - Seeing is NOT believing
But believing is seeing.

*Listen, we cannot experience the truth that the aeroplane we are sitting in can fly unless we put our trust in it
We can watch other people’s aeroplane fly but we will never experience it for ourselves unless we get on board and trust.*

If you want to experience the touch of God in your life
If you want to turn Jesus from a distant figure to a trusted Friend
then you need to get yourself in a position to have a conversation with God:
on an Alpha Course, here in church, alone in your room,
If you want to encounter the touch of God in your life
then in the darkness you need to call out “have mercy on me” and
I am willing to call you “Lord”.

And then God will touch you and you will experience

3. The Spirit’s Life in you.

The bit that everybody sees about these blind men, was the bit at the end – how their life changed.
The anatomy of faith that people see in us, is the difference that Jesus makes.
His Spirit’s life in us.

For our blind men the difference that Jesus made was both obvious and actually misleading. In v30 we have “*Jesus warning them sternly “see that no-one knows about this. But they went out and spread the news about him all over that region!”*

It’s reassuring to know that even Jesus had trouble with people breaking confidences. He says ‘don’t tell anyone’ and the next thing they are doing is telling everyone!

Why does he say “don’t tell anyone?”

The answer is that, the point their encounter with Jesus was not about their eyes, its was their changed relationship with God
Jesus Christ came first and foremost for us to have a living relationship with God.

Its that that makes the difference!

If the only difference that Jesus makes in our lives is that he helps us with our problems (our health, our relationships, our jobs, our families) then we've missed the point– Big Deal!

If we simply look to God to help us with these things – then we've missed the point.

Jesus helped these men see, but that isn't the point of his coming to earth!

One day they wouldn't see!

one day their eyesight would dim,

one day their eyes would close in death

Then what of Jesus' miracle?!

What would his miracle be worth to them then? Nothing!

Jesus didn't want them to talk about their healing because this wasn't the real difference that he makes in people's lives.

Sure he can heal, sure he can answer prayers, sure he can help us in our troubles...

But the real difference he makes is that we *can know God* and that changes our life!

The more we say "yes Lord" (the more we accept him as Master and Friend) the more powerful the touch of God's Spirit in our life.

Throughout his life Jesus us shows again and again that he loves us just as we are – he talks to the sinner, he touches the leper, he has time for the prostitute – he accepts us – and when we see that the Lord God of the Universe values us, then the greater the freedom for us from constantly looking to others for approval.

I was talking this week with a man who got himself into all sorts of a trouble because he wanted to please two people, and the problem was they both asked for his help at the same time, and he said "yes" to both – even though he couldn't be in two different places at the same time!

I was talking to a teenager who deliberately told a lie that really messed them up because they just wanted to say what the other person wanted to hear.

I met a young woman this week whose outlook on her body shape is completely controlled by what other people say.

Encountering Jesus as Master and Friend convinces us that it is the God of the Universe's opinion of us that counts - and he frees us to live.

The more we say "yes Lord" the more powerful the touch of God's Spirit in our life.

On the cross Jesus shows us that we are forgiven despite the fact that we constantly screw up and therefore we are free from condemnation and guilt.

and when we see that the Lord God of the Universe forgives us then he gives us the power to forgive OURSELVES and OTHERS

How many people cannot escape the prison of their own condemnation because they will not forgive themselves?

How many people's lives are turned bitter, sleepless nights, and dark imaginations because they won't (or cannot) forgive others

Encountering Jesus as Master and Friend convinces us that we do not need to listen to the voices of condemnation or to condemn others.

This is the real difference that he makes!

The more we say "yes Lord" the more powerful the touch of God's Spirit in our life.

Out of a resurrected tomb Jesus proves there is eternal life, and that this life is not all there is.

We cremated Harry Mesiner's body this week. He met Jesus. He encountered him. Jesus was so real to him, so present to him that he said when he got up to go to the loo at night, he got up carefully so as not to wake Jesus who was sleeping next to him.

Harry died unafraid of death.

His life was changed!

There is more to this life, than this life.

Encountering Jesus as Lord convinces us that we do not need to hold so tightly to the things of this world given what God has in store for us.

He frees our life to tithe our income so as to see this life in others.

He makes a difference and this is what people see in our FAITH.

Faith:

at its core, is a Belief that we can have a relationship with God – and we can!

its backbone is an Encounter with Jesus when we say "Yes Lord"

its proof is seen, in the more we say "yes Lord", the more powerful his touch on our life

he frees us to be ourselves, to forgive ourselves, to have no fear, to live a life that longs for others to find for themselves.

You can have it too

Belief, Encounter, Life – go find it!