

Though I Was Blind, Now I See, Part 1 (John 9:1-41)

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Helen Keller became blind and deaf when she was 19 months old. In 1933, she penned the following words in *The Atlantic*:

"I have often thought it would be a blessing if each human being were stricken blind and deaf for a few days at some time during his early adult life. Darkness would make him more appreciative of sight; silence would teach him the joys of sound. Now and then I have tested my seeing friends to discover what they see. Recently I was visited by a very good friend who had just returned from a long walk in the woods, and I asked her what she had observed. 'Nothing in particular,' she replied. I might have been incredulous had I not been accustomed to such responses, for long ago I became convinced that the seeing see little. How was it possible to walk for an hour through the woods and see nothing worthy of note?"

Keller proceeds to describe in vivid detail the "hundreds of things" that interest her through "mere touch." She speaks of the "delicate symmetry of a leaf," the "smooth skin of a silver birch," the "velvety texture of a flower," or "the cool waters of a brook." Then she adds, "At times my heart cries out with longing to see all these things. If I can get so much pleasure from mere touch, how much more beauty must be revealed by sight. Yet, those who have eyes apparently see little."

Keller makes a provoking point. It is possible to have physical eyes, yet not actually see all that is around us. Jn 9 teaches us the same principle is even more true in a spiritual sense. We think we know the truth about God when in reality we are completely blind. Absent a miraculous work of God, we will never know or worship God for who he is.

The story begins with a case of physical blindness. But the point of all that follows concerns our spiritual sight and in particular the difference between those who actually know Jesus and those who think they know Jesus. For until you see Jesus for who he really is, not according to the dictates of human reason, but through faith seeking understanding, you are blind to the most important spiritual truth of all.

The good news of the gospel is that **Jesus uses the blindness of men to display the greatness of his power**. John Newton's well-known lyric hymns not the power

of human self-consciousness or personal enlightenment, but the mercy of God, a mercy that reaches into our spiritual darkness and opens our eyes to perceive the glory of God in the face of Christ. "Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see."

When a bright light suddenly shines in a dark room one of two things happens. Some see what they never saw before. Others are blinded. The two-fold spiritual dynamic at work in this chapter hasn't changed over the last two-thousand years. As the light of the world, what Jesus came to do is what he continues to do today. V. 39, "Jesus said, 'For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.'"

Jesus gives sight to those who are blind. And Jesus blinds those who think they can see. We need to look carefully at each of those actions in turn. We'll consider the first this morning by focusing on the experience of the blind man and the second next Sunday by focusing on the experience of the Pharisees. I think the Lord has more to teach us in these verses than we can readily grasp in a single sermon! Here's the first way Jesus uses the blindness of men to display the greatness of his power. **JESUS GIVES SIGHT TO THOSE WHO ARE BLIND.**

We live in a world filled with unexplainable evil and suffering. Children are murdered in the womb. Innocent men and women languish in prison. Genetic disorders and sickness destroy our ability to see, hear, or walk. We read v. 1, "As he passed by, [Jesus] saw a man blind from birth," and something deep within us shouts, "That's not right. That's not the way things are supposed to be." To which the entire Bible says, "You're absolutely correct," that is not the way things are supposed to be because it is not the way the world was created to be. Our consciousness of what is just and right, corrupted as it is, reflects the character of a perfectly just God who created us in his image.

The Bible is brutally honest about two things. The world God created was impeccably good, no sin, no sickness, no death. And the world we live in, the world Jn 9 describes, is grievously broken. And that causes all of us, on some level, to wrestle with a difficult question. Why are things the way they are? Why are children born blind? And how does that square with the existence and power of God?

The question posed by Jesus' followers when they saw the blind man reflects one answer. V. 2, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"



Where any form of suffering is present, they assume personal sin must be present. Is that true, friend? The collective testimony of Scripture says yes and no.

All the brokenness in our world, the groaning of creation, is rooted in sin in the sense that it's the result of the curse that fell on the first man and woman for rebelling against God's authority. As our covenant representative, when Adam sinned, we all sinned, destroying our relationship with God and the world he created. As a result, we all deserve death. No blind man can point a finger at God and say, "I deserve better."

The Bible also contains many examples of people suffering as a result of personal or corporate sin. Think of the church in Corinth mishandling the Lord's Supper or Ananias and Sapphira struck down for lying to the Holy Spirit. However, there are plenty of different examples where suffering is clearly not a direct result of personal sin. Job didn't lose his family and possessions because he sinned. Nor did Jesus die on the cross because he sinned. So sickness and death may be the result of personal sin, but not necessarily. It's a possibility, never a guarantee.

That's where Jesus' disciples went wrong. They treated the personal sin – suffering connection as a foregone conclusion. It's easy to sympathize with their impulse. In the midst of suffering, we want answers, don't we? We want a clear explanation. We want someone somewhere to tell us why this is happening. Meaninglessness will drive you insane.

The Bible doesn't answer every question we have about the existence of evil. But the answer Jesus provides in v. 3 is a precious bulwark for the soul. "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him." Does that mean God is like a policeman who secretly commits a crime so he can get credit for solving the case? Absolutely not. God never does evil. In the mystery of his sovereign will, he permits and uses evil, hardship, and suffering to bear witness to his power and glory.

Here's what that means, friend. Not a single bit of suffering in your life is meaningless. And if you have surrendered your life to King Jesus, you can rest in knowing God will redeem all of your suffering for his glory and your good. His resurrection proves as much! If God can take the greatest possible evil, the crucifixion of his Son, and use it for the greatest possible good, the exaltation of his

glory in the salvation of his people, is anything too hard for the Lord? Is any sorrow in your life too great for him to redeem?

So don't look at hardship, suffering, or weakness in your life as a sign that God isn't treating you the way you deserve. The hardship, suffering, and weakness in your life is an opportunity for God to thrill your soul by displaying the greatness of his power, including the power that sustains our fragile faith until the day he makes all things new. Jesus did exactly that in the blind man's life in two ways he never saw coming.

First, he healed his physical blindness. If you are suffering from physical illness, you are not invisible to God. He sees you. He knows you. You don't have to clamor for his attention lest he overlook you. The blind man wasn't calling out for Jesus. Nor did he ask Jesus to heal him. Jesus saw him even though he couldn't see Jesus. He drew near and anointed the man's eyes with the dust of the earth, recalling the very way he created Adam back in Gen 2. It's also a picture of how the Lord delights to use the most ordinary means to accomplish supernatural work in our lives. He didn't whip up a magic potion. He anointed him with mud! Don't ever say circumstances have changed such that God can't intervene in your life. He can use anything, mud included, to accomplish his will.

He put it on his eyes. Then he invited the man to exercise the obedience of faith. V. 7, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam." The very name of the pool, "Sent," points to the power of the One who issued the command. It was the Son sent by the Father who told him to go. The blind man listened to Jesus, trusting the word of the God he had yet to see or know, and "came back seeing."

The compassion and power of God hasn't diminished in the least since that day, friends. The Lord still delights to manifest his strength in our bodies through physical healing. In 1 Cor 12, the Apostle Paul speaks of "gifts of healing" as one of the graces God gives members of his body, the church. Jas 5:15, "And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up."

One of the first and most important things we do as the people of God when we are sick is call upon the name of the Lord by praying for one another. Ex 15:26, "For I am the LORD, your healer." Yet healing from physical blindness wasn't the end of Jesus' work in the man's life. In fact, it was just the beginning, a foretaste, an

illustration, of a second and far greater work yet to come – healing his spiritual blindness.

Everyone who knew him as a blind man was dumbfounded by his healing. Nothing like this had ever happened before! Some even wonder if it's a different guy than the one they've seen begging on the side of the road for years. The poor guy keeps saying, "I'm the man! I'm the man!" It didn't make any sense to his neighbors. People born blind don't just start seeing. So they press the man with the sort of question most rational, pragmatically-minded people would ask. "How were your eyes opened?"

The man gives a straightforward response in v. 11. Notice how he refers to the Lord who healed him. "The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes..." He has no clue who Jesus is. He doesn't even know where he went! All he knows is that someone named Jesus restored his sight. But it seems the wheels are beginning to turn. He's starting to connect the dots between what Jesus did and who Jesus is. When he tells the same story to the Jewish religious leaders, the Pharisees, and they ask, "What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?" the man replies (v. 17), "He is a prophet," or someone who speaks on God's behalf.

We'll look more closely at the Pharisee's attitude next week. Suffice it to say, they're not persuaded that Jesus (whom they refuse to name) has any sort of connection to God. In fact, they're convinced the exact opposite is true. So they call the man back in for a second round of questioning in v. 24, "Give glory to God." Translation? Tell us the truth. There's no way he healed you. "We know this man is a sinner." He has nothing to do with God. He's an imposter. He's leading people away from God. It's the same unbelieving enmity that led them to try and stone Jesus at the end of Ch. 8.

The healed man is undeterred. He leaves the question of Jesus' moral relationship to God up to the Pharisees. V. 25, "Whether he is a sinner, I do not know." But he refuses to change, budge or explain away what his own eyes could not reject. "One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." No matter what other people said, no matter what other people concluded or urged him to believe, he could not deny the personal transformation that had taken place in his life.

Friend, the work of God in and around you is meant to have a similarly arresting effect. It's the Lord's way of getting your attention. Maybe a Christian friend



encouraged you to trust the Lord to provide financially for your needs. If you received an unexpected check or side job, don't explain away the obvious. That's God caring for you! Maybe you've started coming back to church after years of disinterest and noticed you're more joyful than you've been in a long time. Don't explain away the obvious. That's God caring for you!

Maybe you've prayed for years for God to provide a home for you and your family or to bring relief to a chronic illness and in the last few months, everything with the mortgage company fell in place or the pain went away as mysteriously as it came. Don't explain away the obvious. That's God caring for you! Maybe you did your best to run as far from God as fast as possible for years. Until one day, the Lord drew your wayward heart back to him changing your life in ways you never dreamed possible. Don't explain away the obvious by mumbling something about making smarter choices. That's God caring for you!

The manifold works of God, big and small, are signposts from the Lord designed to point us back to the truth of his power and goodness. The record of God's faithful to his people in the Bible functions in a similar way. When we experience or read someone else's experience of God's work, it strengthens our confidence in the truth of who he is. It's why reading our Bibles and sharing testimonies with one another is so important. We get to hear over and over again, "One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see!"

In fact, sharing your personal experience of God's work your life is one of the most compelling ways you can bear witness to him, friend, especially in a culture that says there is no such thing as objective truth, there is only your experience and mine, your cultural standpoint and mine. We don't invest our subjective experience of God with some kind of ultimate authority. We reserve that authority for the Word of God alone.

At the same time, we recognize our subjective experiences of God point to the objective truth of his person and work. It's not easy to find a neighbor who wants to hear 10 reasons why the Bible is true. But many people will listen to a story of how God has changed your life. Take advantage of that, brothers and sisters. Tell your story!

When the Pharisees persist in denying that Jesus has any connection to God, the man forcefully rebukes them. He starts in v. 31 with a biblical principle. In general,



God displays his redeeming power through those who obediently follow him, not sinners hellbent on running the opposite direction. Ps 66:18, "If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened."

Second, he adds in v. 32 a historical observation. Mere men don't heal people who are born blind. It's never been done in the history of the world! Finally, he draws the natural conclusion in v. 33. My healing must be a God thing. The only way Jesus could open my eyes is if he is "from God," if God is working in and through him. Otherwise, "he could do nothing."

The man spoke the truth. He sees who Jesus is in part. He is from God! And his stubborn refusal to believe otherwise struck the Pharisees as a direct threat to their religious authority. So they kick him out of the synagogue in v. 34, effectively cutting him off from the Jewish community for refusing to support their "informed" perspective on Jesus. It wasn't an act of loving discipline reflecting the heart of God. It was a power play fueled by arrogant confidence in the superiority of their own opinion.

God is intimately aware of the social injustice, oppression, and suffering his people experience at the hands of sinful men. He always has been and still is today. When Jesus hears in v. 35 that "they had cast him out," he seeks the healed man out for a second time. And this time, he gives him a far better gift than physical sight. He asks a pointed question. "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

It was another way of referring to the Messiah, the Anointed One in Dan 7:13-14 who would bring the kingdom of God to pass. "And behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

To ask, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" was another way of saying, "Where does your confidence for salvation lie? Does your hope for deliverance from the curse of sin and all our sin has made wrong lie in the Lord and the Savior he has promised or somewhere else? Do you believe in yourself? Do you believe in your riches? Do you believe in the arc of history or our better angels?"

The man's reply beautifully captures the very question the entire Gospel of John was written to answer. It's the most important question he could have asked. It's the most important question you will ever ask, friend. "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" I want to believe! I know I can't save myself. I know no one else can save me. It's a God-sized task. So how do I look to him? Point me in the right direction.

Jesus replies in vv. 37 with some of the most moving words in the gospel. "Jesus said to him, 'You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.'" I didn't open your physical eyes so you could see the world in general. I opened your physical eyes so you could see me, so you could fix your gaze on me, so you could know me, the Son of Man, sent from the Father not just to heal your body but to save your soul. And what you see of me with your eyes and what you hear from me with your ears isn't a religious data point or a file for your shelf of spiritual knowledge. It's a summons to faith.

Jesus wasn't inviting the man to believe God was real or that everything would work out in the end. He wasn't encouraging him to embrace positive thoughts, good vibes, or get in touch with his inner self. It wasn't an invitation to being more spiritual. It was an invitation to lean the weight of his life on Jesus, the Son of God. And in that moment, the second miracle happened.

The Creator quickened a spiritually dead heart and made it alive. He had seen Jesus with the eyes of his body. But now he saw Jesus with the eyes of his soul, with the eyes of faith. He realized Jesus wasn't a mere man, a prophet, or someone from God. He was God in human flesh. Why? Because the Lord supernaturally enabled him to see what was actually true. V. 38, "He said, 'Lord, I believe,' and he worshiped him."

2 Cor 4:6, "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." The greatest blindness in the world is not a blindness of the eyes. It's the blindness of the heart, a blindness of soul that keeps us from seeing our need for a Savior, God's provision in Jesus, and believing him accordingly.

If you're a Christian, if you are trusting Jesus' work in his life, death, and resurrection to bring you home to God, then there is one explanation and one explanation only for the presence of faith in your heart – a merciful God has opened your eyes. We



are all born blind, blind to the glory of God, blind to the truth of Jesus, blind to the futility of saving ourselves. We cannot give ourselves spiritual sight any more than we can give ourselves physical sight. Both the ability to see Jesus as worthy of our trust and faith to believe him accordingly are a supernatural gift from God. No one sees Jesus for who he really is apart from the eye-opening work of the Spirit.

Jesus loves to display the greatness of his power by giving sight to those who are blind. I love how J.C. Ryle captures our appropriate response. "Such a miracle, above all, is meant to make us hopeful about our own souls and the souls of others. Why should we despair of salvation while we have such a Savior? Where is the spiritual disease that He cannot take away? He can open the eyes of the most sinful and ignorant, and make them see things they never saw before. He can send light into the darkest heart, and cause blindness and prejudice to pass away."

CONCLUSION

If you sense your own spiritual blindness, take heart and cry out to Jesus. "Lord, I am blind. Help me to see!" If you grieve your spouse's or your child's or your friend's spiritual blindness, take heart and cry out to Jesus. "Lord, I cannot open their eyes, but you can. Have mercy." And if you know Jesus, love Jesus, and believe what the Bible teaches us about God, but find yourself tempted to scoff or look down on people who don't, remember, you didn't open your own eyes. Jesus did. You are no better. Jesus laid his hand on you. That is all.

The fact that Jesus uses the blindness of men to display the greatness of his power should fill our mouths with earnest prayer and grateful praise. We're going to do both this morning. Let's start with praise.