

From Blindness to Sight

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[0:00] Well, we're going to come now to read from God's Word, reading from John chapter 9. I'm going to read the whole chapter from verse 1 to 41, and it's on the church Bibles.

In the church Bibles, if you want to grab one, pick it up, page 1070 or thereabouts, and it's also up on the screen for you to follow. John chapter 9, reading from verse 1.

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?

Neither this man nor his parents sinned, said Jesus, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me.

Night is coming when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world. After saying this, he spat on the ground and made some mud with the saliva and put it on the man's eyes.

[1:11] Go, he told him, wash in the pool of Siloam. This word means sent. So the man went and washed and came home seeing. His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?

Some claimed that he was. Others said, no, he only looks like him. But he himself insisted, I am the man. How then were your eyes opened?

They asked. He replied, the man they call Jesus. Made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash.

So I went and washed and then I could see. Where is this man? They asked him. I don't know, he said. They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind.

Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath.

Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. He put mud on my eyes, the man replied, and I washed and now I see.

[2:22] Some of the Pharisees said, this man is not from God for he does not keep the Sabbath. But others asked, how can a sinner perform such signs? So they were divided.

Then they turned again to the blind man. What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened. The man replied, he is a prophet. They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents.

Is this your son? They asked. Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see? We know he is our son, the parents answered.

And we know he was born blind. But how he can now see or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age. He will speak for himself. His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue.

That was why his parents said, he is of age. Ask him. A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. Give glory to God by telling the truth, they said.

[3:37] 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.

Then they asked him, what did he do to you? How did he open your eyes? He answered, I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again?

Do you want to become his disciples too? Then they hurled insults at him and said, you are this fellow's disciple. We are disciples of Moses. We know that God spoke to Moses.

But as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from. The man answered, now, that is remarkable. You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes.

We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.

[4:40] To this they replied, you were steeped in sin at birth. How dare you lecture us? And they threw him out. Jesus heard that they had thrown him out.

And when he found him, he said, do you believe in the son of man? Who is he, sir? The man asked, tell me so that I may believe in him. Jesus said, you have now seen him.

In fact, he is the one speaking with you. Then the man said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him. Jesus said, for judgment, I have come into this world so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.

Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, what? Are we blind too? Jesus said, if you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin.

But now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains. Amen. May God bless to our hearts this reading from his word.

[5:48] Let's pray and ask for his help as we look at it together. Thank you, our God, for your word that points us to your son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we pray now that as we learn more of him, that we would see him for who he is. And we would respond to you with joy and gratitude.

For we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Okay. Well, what were you doing around 7 p.m. on Wednesday, the 12th of August?

7 p.m. Wednesday, the 12th of August. Let me tell you what you were doing. You were probably looking up at the sky to see a solar eclipse. It was to be the best solar eclipse visible from the UK and Ireland so far this century.

But if you were looking for it, in reality, it was just like another normal dull day in Glasgow. But we were warned, don't look directly at the sun because it can damage your eyes and it can cause blindness.

[6:55] And so we were urged to wear these special solar eclipse glasses. Or maybe you could do something with a colander over your face, which I never quite understood.

Do explain to me afterwards if you know what that was all about. Now, the sun's light during the eclipse had a twofold effect. The beautiful light shone and helped us to see.

But that same light was so strong that it could damage our eyes. And now when we hear Jesus say, I am the light of the world, what we discover in John chapter 9 is that this light also has a twofold effect.

Because as the light, Jesus enables the blind to see. But he also blinds those who think they can see.

And so the story of Jesus healing a blind man in John chapter 9 operates on two levels. Because as Jesus opens a blind man's eyes to give him physical sight, it's a sign showing us that Jesus came to give us spiritual sight.

[8:11] And so John 9 tells us how the blind man moves towards this spiritual sight. While at the same time as he moves towards spiritual sight, the Pharisees, that's the Jewish religious leaders, they become more spiritually blind.

And so if we're going to see, we need Jesus, the light of the world, to shine into our spiritual blindness. And so the message is as simple as, are you blind or can you see?

Let's look at this under three headings this afternoon. First, a sign to see. Second, an examination of sight. And then third, the test results.

So first of all, a sign to see in verse 1 to 7. Now this is the fifth sign in the gospel according to John. And it follows on from Jesus' teaching at the festival of tabernacles, where we were looking the last couple of weeks.

And that's where Jesus first said, I am the light of the world. And now he gives sight to a man who's born blind. But this man's blindness raises a question amongst Jesus' disciples.

[9:31] So you see in verse 2, they're asking, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? And so the assumption is that the man's blindness is a consequence of sin.

Either his or his parents. So who is responsible? Well, it was an issue for the disciples. It was an issue for the people at the time.

And it still is an issue for people today. Where the reasoning is personal suffering is due to personal sin. And yet we don't need a big discussion about this because Jesus gives us a simple answer. In verse 3, he says, So Jesus insists this man's blindness isn't the result of his sin or his parents' sin.

And so while we know from reading the Bible that all sin and all suffering is a result of the fall, it can all be traced back to there, Jesus doesn't let us say that a person's individual suffering is always a result of their personal sin.

[10 : 49] And so Jesus tells us that this man's blindness is so that the works of God might be displayed in him. This is about how his blindness serves God's purposes.

So the man's blindness was there so that Jesus would heal him. And Jesus would then reveal his identity as the Son of God. And so bring glory to God for what was done.

And so it's a sign for us to see. Pointing to the fact that Jesus is doing the work of his Father who sent him. And so in verse 4 and 5, Jesus says, While I am in the world, I am the light of the world. He's repeating what he said about being the light of the world. And remember, this is a metaphor that explains the blind man coming to see. And it's the fulfillment of what's said in the prophet Isaiah.

Those words from Isaiah 42 that we read at the beginning of the service. Where blindness is not just a physical thing. Blindness describes a spiritual condition.

[12 : 01] And so listen again to Isaiah 42 where the Lord says, He will make his servant a light for the Gentiles to open eyes that are blind. And here is the Lord's servant opening blind eyes.

And so Jesus is the light God promised who would shine into this world's darkness to deliver people from blindness. And yet at the same time, he would also expose the blindness of God's people Israel.

Which again comes from Isaiah who have eyes but are blind. And so can you see what Jesus is doing here? He proves that he is the light of the world by giving this man both physical sight and also spiritual sight.

And yet showing the spiritual blindness of those who refuse him. The Pharisees. So see how this happens. Look at verse 6 and 7. Now Jesus didn't need to do this in stages, did he?

A word from Jesus and the blind man could see. But what he does instead is he makes this kind of mud pack with the saliva from the dust of the ground.

[13 : 35] And then he puts it on the man's eyes. Telling him to go and wash in this pool. Which John says is the pool of Siloam. Which he says the word Siloam means scent.

And so why is Jesus doing it in this way? Well two things. One is spitting on the ground and making mud. Actually recalls the original creation of man.

Remember when Genesis chapter 2 when God formed Adam. He formed him from the dust of the ground and then breathed life into him.

And so as Jesus stoops down here to the dust of the ground. He's performing this mini act of creation by giving new life to this blind man's eyes.

And so it's a sign to show us who Jesus really is. And I think that's why John's comment about the name of the pool isn't coincidental. Because he says Siloam means scent.

[14 : 38] And he's telling us Jesus has been sent. Jesus has been sent from God the Father. And the fact that Jesus has been sent by God the Father is frequently mentioned throughout John's gospel.

He has been sent by God. And so Jesus is doing here what only God can do. In giving this blind man his sight.

And so it is a beautiful sign. And it's one that shows how Jesus works in our lives. Where becoming a follower of Jesus is essentially a shift from spiritual blindness to spiritual sight.

From darkness to light. That's how my mom would describe her conversion to Christianity. She speaks of the process of becoming a Christian.

Being like having her blind eyes opened. Because as she understood more and more of who Jesus is over a period of time.

[15 : 46] She felt like she was moving from darkness into light. From blindness into sight. And yet whoever we are. The reality is that we will be spiritually blind until Jesus opens our eyes.

And so that's the first point. A sign to see. The second point is an examination of sight. And that's what happens next in the story. The man receives his sight.

And he's examined for how all of this happened. In fact he is interrogated about what happened. And it happens over a series of four interviews.

And so we'll just look briefly at each. They're up on the screen. The first interview is the neighbours examine the man. Verse 8 to 12. The neighbours are confused. They don't know whether this healed man is the same one who used to sit and beg.

Some thought he was. Others thought he wasn't. And so they debate. And as they debate they seem to ignore the man. And the man's there saying. I am the man. Hello. I'm here.

[16:52] I can see. That was me that sat and begged. And now I can see. And so when they confirmed that it was actually him. They asked how he could see.

And so he tells them the story. In verse 10 and 11. That his eyes were opened by this man. Jesus. Jesus. And so there's no denying the blind man could now see because of Jesus.

And the neighbours were witnesses to this testimony. But for some reason the neighbours then drag the man off to be examined by the Pharisees. And so he's interrogated by them.

In verse 13 to 17. The Pharisees examine the man. They basically launch an investigation into what has happened to establish the facts. And so they realise.

Okay. The healing took place on the Sabbath. And now the Pharisees already had beef with Jesus for healing on the Sabbath before. Because the Sabbath was the day of rest.

[17:53] And so the scriptures had forbidden doing any work on the Sabbath. But Jesus didn't just heal on the Sabbath. According to the Pharisees.

He had broken their rules. And so they had gone further than what God had said in his commandment about the Sabbath. And they had devised 39 categories of things that could be constituted as work.

And they were quite keen to pick people up on when they considered that they were doing work on the Sabbath. And yet the problem was all of these rules were man-made rules. And among these rules were healing.

Which is what Jesus did. But also kneading. As in kneading dough for bread. And so Jesus spitting on the ground. And then making mud.

Would have been regarded as the work of kneading. By the Pharisees. And so that led them to conclude. Jesus couldn't be from God. Verse 16.

[18:58] Straightforward for some of them. That's the verdict. Case closed. Dismissed. And yet for some Pharisees. The jury is still out. Because they know a sinner couldn't do something like this.

The sign was so amazing. That they were curious about the identity of the one who performed it. And so they asked the man. Verse 17. What have you to say about him?

It was your eyes he opened. And so the man moves. You notice from calling Jesus a man. To calling Jesus a prophet. Yet the Pharisees still want to damn Jesus.

But either way. The evidence for Jesus demands a verdict. Doesn't it? But the Pharisees still can't accept what's actually happened. So next. Thirdly. They summon the man's parents.

And they examine them. And in doing so. The Pharisees essentially prove that they are not neutral when it comes to Jesus. They won't accept the primary evidence.

[20:08] The blind man who can see. Or the witness testimony. Of the neighbors who have verified it. And so next they go to the man's parents. And they have a go at them.

They want to confirm that he is their son who was born blind. They refuse to comment on what happened. Turns out they fear the Jewish leaders. And so verse 22 tells us.

His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah. Would be put out of the synagogue. John's saying it was a risk if you were positive towards Jesus.

You'd be excommunicated from the synagogue. Which for us doesn't seem like a big deal. But for them it was a massive deal. You weren't just kicked out of the worship service.

But you were a social outcast in the community. Because you couldn't go to the synagogue. But the parents don't completely cave in. Because they tell the leaders to speak to their son.

[21:11] And so they do. And so fourthly the Pharisees examine the man again. Verse 24 to 34. And notice how forceful they are this time. Verse 24 says.

A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. Gave glory to God by telling the truth. They said. We know this man is a sinner. And so they refuse to see who Jesus really is.

And that's the point. They cannot see. They are blind. But as the Pharisees seek to slander Jesus. Notice how the man sticks to his guns.

He was blind. He now sees. A miracle took place. And Jesus did it. And yet they still continue to interrogate him.

Verse 26. Then they asked him. What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes? So now they can't deny the miracle. They then want to try and find an issue with the one who performed the miracle.

[22:18] Verse 27. He answered. I have told you already. And you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?

The healed man is on to them. He knows they are prejudiced against Jesus. Bias against him. And they've made up their minds on Jesus.

They do not want to open their eyes to see. They are still in the dark. And remain blind. And the evidence makes no difference to them whatsoever.

And so the man sarcastically asks if they want to be Jesus' disciples too. Because he is beginning to see who Jesus is.

And yet they're incensed. And so their true colors shine through in verse 28 and 29. Not only are these religious leaders against Jesus.

[23:16] They are now against the man as well. And the man is staggered at just how ignorant and just how blind these religious leaders actually are.

It's as if he says to them, you're the experts here. Surely you should know about this man if he opens blind eyes. Nobody opens blind eyes.

And he's done it. It's amazing. I can see. So he can't be a sinner. Because God doesn't work through sinners. So boys, isn't this obvious?

Can't you really see what's happening here? And look at verse 33. See what he says. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing. He's saying Jesus has got to be from God.

After all of the examination and after all of the explanation, that is the obvious answer. Surely. And yet that's not the verdict the Pharisees want to reach from their investigations.

[24:25] And so their verbal abuse of the man turns into physical abuse. And they excommunicate him from the synagogue as well. Verse 34. So much for a calm and reasonable examination of the facts.

Rather than reach the obvious conclusion, these guys lose the plot and excommunicate the poor man. And the irony is they think they can judge who's in and who's out when it comes to God. Which is a role that belongs to Jesus alone. And they have already judged Jesus and condemned him. Okay, so Jesus healed the blind man.

And in the examination of the miracle, the question of Jesus' identity can't simply be ignored. And yet it raises this tension between the Jewish leaders and Jesus.

By refusing to acknowledge what the miracle tells them about Jesus, they're showing that they are spiritually blind. Which tells us that when it comes to Jesus, we often find that people just don't want to see.

[25:43] They will refuse the evidence. They will not look at the real Jesus because they don't actually want the real Jesus in their lives.

So it's not so much that they cannot see. It's more that they will not see. Despite the clear evidence before them. Okay, so first there's a sign to see.

Second, there's an examination of sight. And then thirdly, we get the test results that come from Jesus. So we've had the sign. We've had the examination.

The eye test, as it were, for both the blind man and for the Pharisees. Jesus shows up again at the end of chapter 9. And he gives the test results on their sight.

Where the man comes to spiritual sight. Whereas the Pharisees continue in spiritual darkness. So let's look at the man first.

[26:41] Verse 35. Jesus heard that they had thrown him out. And when he found him, he said, Do you believe in the Son of Man? Who is he, sir? The man asked. Tell me so that I may believe in him.

Jesus said, You have now seen him. In fact, he is the one speaking with you. The man said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him.

Can you see how the story of this man coming from physical blindness to physical sight is like an acted parable showing us what it's like to come from spiritual blindness into spiritual sight.

The man is a picture of this as we trace his journey of seeing who Jesus really is. I wonder if you notice the development in the way he identified Jesus throughout the chapter.

So in verse 11, he first mentions Jesus as the man they call Jesus. Then in verse 17, the man says, He is a prophet. Then in verse 33, the man says, Jesus is from God.

[27:52] He's seeing more of who Jesus is. And then now we come to his conversation with Jesus in verse 38, where the man's final words are, Lord, I believe.

And he worshipped Jesus. Jesus brought him from spiritual blindness to spiritual sight. And so when Jesus asks, Do you believe in the Son of Man?

The man's not sure who Jesus is speaking about. So Jesus says there in verse 37, Then you have now seen him. In fact, he is the one speaking with you.

Now we've seen this before in calling himself the Son of Man. Jesus is talking about the great figure in Daniel chapter 7 in the Old Testament. The one to whom God gives authority and glory and sovereign power over all peoples.

And he will appear at the end of history to judge and rule forever. The Son of Man. And Jesus claims to be him.

[28:57] And so the man believes and he worships Jesus. Interestingly, this is the only time in the Gospel of John before the resurrection of Jesus where somebody worships Jesus.

And so it's telling us that the man has been fully healed. Not just of his physical blindness, but of his spiritual blindness.

Because now he can see. Because the sign of spiritual sight is the worship of Jesus. Therefore, a failure to worship Jesus then, now, always, is an indication of spiritual blindness.

Can you see this? If you pardon the pun. Because if we cannot see Jesus for who he is and worship Jesus as God, then we are blind.

Even if we don't realize it. And that's why Jesus, the Son of Man, came for judgment. As he says, verse 39. So that's the man's test result, as it were.

[30:06] Let's look at the Pharisees. Verse 39. Jesus said, For judgment I have come into this world so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind. Jesus is claiming he came to bring about a reversal.

He came so that the blind would see. That's what's happened with the healing of the blind man. And also so that those who see would become blind.

And that's what's happening here with some of the Pharisees. And it sounds strange, but Jesus has come in judgment to blind those who can't see.

They might claim they can see, but in claiming they can see, they can't. Look at verse 40 to 41.

Some Pharisees who were there with him heard him say this and asked, What are we blind to? Jesus said, If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin. But now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains. This is a scathing rebuke on the Pharisees.

[31:14] They remain spiritually blind. And they're aware that Jesus is on to them. And yet the irony is they still ask Jesus if they are blind.

They're so confident in their own ability to see, they don't realize how blind they actually are. And Jesus is saying, if only you could acknowledge your blindness, then you wouldn't be guilty.

And so there'd be hope for you. But as they claim to be able to see, their guilt remains. And that's a terrible condition to be in, isn't it? Let me try to illustrate.

Just say you're having trouble with your eyesight. And I know some of us are. The worst thing you can do is to ignore it and pretend that your sight is fine.

Because what's going to happen is that your eyesight is only going to get worse, isn't it? If you don't admit you've got a problem, it's a bad thing. And admitting you've got a problem is a good thing.

[32:18] Because you know that you need to get help, either from the optician or the optometrist or the ophthalmologist or whoever. Because they might do something to help your eyesight.

But if you can't accept there's a problem, nobody can help you. And so Jesus here is talking to people who don't even think they've got a problem.

And that's why Jesus exposes their blindness in his judgment. And so at the same time, we've got this twofold effect.

The light of Jesus comes and heals blindness. But it also judges blindness. Jesus is the light of the world does two things.

He gives his light to those who, like this man, are willing to believe in him. But he also blinds the stubborn, like the Pharisees who don't want him.

[33:18] See the twofold effect? It helps people to see or it blinds them. The spiritually blind will either see the light or ignore the light.

Be drawn in to come and see or be repelled and remain blind. Blind. To step into the light. Or to go deeper into darkness.

And so as we close, the sign in this chapter shows that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. And that by believing, we may have life in his name.

The blind man got this. And he has got this fantastic story. This testimony of how Jesus transformed his life. And it's right there in verse 25.

Simple. He says, I was blind, but now I see. That's also the testimony of the former slave trader, John Owen.

[34:23] And the great hymn writer whose hymn, Amazing Grace, we're going to sing next. He wrote, Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.

I once was lost, but now I'm found. Was blind, but now I see. And so the question is, what is your testimony?

Of course, testimonies can happen in a million different ways to a million different people. But this story of how Jesus transforms this man shows us that all testimonies basically all boil down to the same simple thing.

I was blind, but now I see. Can you say the same? Maybe so. That's right.