

## ***Answering Jesus: Have you ever acknowledged your Spiritual Blindness?***

*John 9*

Today we conclude our sermon series in the gospel of John. We've been looking at six conversations Jesus had with individuals or groups of people. In each case Jesus either explicitly or implicitly asks a question of every person who listens in on His conversation: Have you been born from above? Are you allowing Jesus to satisfy your deepest hunger and to quench your soul's thirst? Do you wish to be made well?

Today's passage is John 9, the account of Jesus healing the man blind from birth. This is one of the miraculous "signs" that Jesus performs. The miracle itself is significant because it meets a real need, but it is also *an acted out parable* because it illustrates a deeper spiritual truth. By the end of the chapter, Jesus moves from talking about physical blindness to talking about spiritual blindness.

We'll work our way through this passage rather quickly. This passage will challenge us to evaluate whether we're more like the man blind from birth or his neighbors or his parents or the Pharisees.

***Jesus heals the "man blind from birth."*** (9:1-7) We pick up the narrative in verse 1:

1 As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. 2 And His disciples asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?"

If you've ever read the OT book of Job, you recognize the presupposition behind the disciples' question. Job's "friends" believed that there was a direct, cause and effect relationship between Job's misfortune and suffering and his sin. The disciples saw a man blind from birth and assumed that his blindness was the direct result of somebody's sin - either his parents' sin or his own sin. Some in that day thought that it was possible to sin while you were still in your mother's womb; and some taught that a condition like being blind from birth was the consequence of some sin you would commit after you were born.

3 Jesus answered, "It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him.

Jesus doesn't make a pronouncement about the **cause** of the man's blindness. He does say that the man's blindness wasn't caused by his or his parents' sin. Jesus says that whatever the cause, God was sovereign over this man's blindness; his blindness would serve as a showcase of the works of God.

4 "We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work. 5 "While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world."

It's hard for us to appreciate a world without electricity and light at the flip of a switch. In Jesus' world when night descended, work came to a screeching halt. Jesus describes His leaving the world (at His crucifixion) as "night when no one can work." This "night"

would be temporary since Jesus would be resurrected and since the Holy Spirit would be sent to indwell the church. But Jesus' bodily presence as "the light of the world" would soon be over. (see John 12:35-36). Until that time, Jesus would continue to shine and He and His disciples would do the works that God wanted them to do, including healing this man blind from birth.

6 When He had said this, He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and applied the clay to his eyes, 7 and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is translated, Sent). So he went away and washed, and came back seeing.

We see great variety in the way Jesus healed people (e.g., Mark 8:22-26). Here He makes "clay" out of dirt and spit, applies it to the man's eyes (presumably closed), and tells him to "Go wash in the pool of Siloam." There is lots of speculation about why Jesus made clay out of dirt and spit. But we simply don't know why because we aren't told.

What is clear is that Jesus would heal the man, but the man wouldn't be passive; he would have to go wash off the clay in the pool of Siloam. [Since Jesus had just referred to Himself as the one "sent" by God in verse 4, John probably adds the comment that Siloam means "sent" to reinforce that this healing was evidence that Jesus had indeed been sent by God.] The man went away and washed, and came back seeing!

### ***Discussions about Jesus:***

Significantly, Jesus doesn't reappear in the narrative until verse 35. In the intervening verses, John records four separate discussions about Jesus between various parties in Jerusalem: the blind man who was healed, his neighbors, the Pharisees, and the parents of the man who was healed. Each of these conversations moves the man who was healed closer to faith in Jesus and moves others (especially the Pharisees) farther away from faith in Jesus. It really matters how you respond to what you hear about Jesus; how you respond will move you closer to Jesus or farther away from Him. I'll read the account of these discussions with little comment due to time constraints.

### ***Discussion about Jesus - Between the Man and His Neighbors (9:8-12)***

Understandably, this man's neighbors were curious about what had happened to him.

8 Therefore the neighbors, and those who previously saw him as a beggar, were saying, "Is not this the one who used to sit and beg?" 9 Others were saying, "This is he," still others were saying, "No, but he is like him." He kept saying, "I am the one." 10 So they were saying to him, "How then were your eyes opened?" 11 He answered, "The man who is called Jesus made clay, and anointed my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash'; so I went away and washed, and I received sight." 12 They said to him, "Where is He?" He said, "I do not know."

The man gives a very clear, simple account of how he had received his sight.

***Discussion about Jesus - Between the Man and the Pharisees - Part 1 (9:13-17)***

13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who was formerly blind. 14 Now it was a Sabbath on the day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. 15 Then the Pharisees also were asking him again how he received his sight. And he said to them, "He applied clay to my eyes, and I washed, and I see." 16 Therefore some of the Pharisees were saying, "This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath." But others were saying, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And there was a division among them. 17 So they said to the blind man again, "What do you say about Him, since He opened your eyes?" And he said, "He is a prophet."

In calling Jesus a prophet, this man had a very clear, confident understanding that Jesus was sent from God. His understanding is incomplete; he will later understand that Jesus is the Son of Man. But here we see that he believes everything that he's seen and heard of Jesus.

***Discussion about Jesus - Between the Man's Parents and the Pharisees (9:18-23)***

The Pharisees want to confirm that a legitimate miracle had taken place, so they interrogate the man's parents.

18 The Jews then did not believe it of him, that he had been blind and had received sight, until they called the parents of the very one who had received his sight, 19 and questioned them, saying, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? Then how does he now see?" 20 His parents answered them and said, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 21 but how he now sees, we do not know; or who opened his eyes, we do not know. Ask him; he is of age, he will speak for himself." 22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone confessed Him to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue. 23 For this reason his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

We shouldn't judge the man's parents too harshly; being put out of the synagogue would be devastating socially, spiritually, and probably financially. But their response makes clear that they were afraid of the Pharisees while their son was fearless.

***Discussion about Jesus - Between the Blind Man and the Pharisees - Part 2***

(9:24-34) Beginning in verse 24 we read that the Pharisees interrogated the man a second time.

24 So a second time they called the man who had been blind, and said to him, "Give glory to God; we know that this man is a sinner." 25 He then answered, "Whether He is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."

This man had a very clear, confident testimony. John Newton made this line famous in *Amazing Grace*: "I once was lost, but now am found; T'was blind, but now I see."

26 So they said to him, "What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?" 27 He answered them, "I told you already and you did not listen; why do you want to hear it again? You do not want to become His disciples too, do you?" 28 They reviled him and said, "You are His disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. 29 "We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where He is from."

Notice that the healed man wouldn't back down. With simple, confident logic the man testifies to what Jesus had done:

30 The man answered and said to them, "Well, here is an amazing thing, that you do not know where He is from, and yet He opened my eyes. 31 "We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing and does His will, He hears him. 32 "Since the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. 33 "If this man were not from God, He could do nothing." 34 They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us?" So they put him out.

This isn't a theological statement about original sin. This is a cruel statement about this man being blind from birth. In saying, "You were steeped in sin at birth" (NIV) they were insinuating that his blindness was the consequence of someone's sin, a judgment that Jesus had told His disciples was misguided. They were so threatened by this man's theological clarity that they "put him out"; they excommunicated him from the local synagogue.

***Jesus reveals the spiritual lesson behind healing the man blind from birth.***

(9:35-41) In verse 35 we read that Jesus found the man who had been blind from birth. Jesus is like that. . . He pursues people. And He draws out our faith.

35 Jesus heard that they had put him out, and finding him, He said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

"Son of Man" was shorthand for "the Messiah." The primary OT reference is Daniel 7. There Daniel saw a heavenly being who took the form of a "son of man" (i.e., he looked human) and who was given authority over all the kingdoms of the earth. Jesus claimed to be this Son of Man, the Messiah. As the Son of Man, Jesus said He came to seek and save that which was lost (John 19:10). In order to draw out his faith, Jesus asks the man blind from birth "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

36 He answered, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" 37 Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you."

When Jesus identifies Himself as the Son of Man (the Messiah) the man responds immediately:

38 And he said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped Him.

John is probably saying that the man fell down on the ground before Jesus and worshiped. He believed and worshiped Jesus. **Believers are worshipers**. If you really believe that Jesus is the Son of Man who gave His life for you, you won't yawn when you think of Him; you will be so enamored with Him that you **will** worship Him.

39 And Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind."

"For judgment" doesn't refer to His ultimate reason for coming into the world; He ultimately came that people might have their sin removed and become God's sons and daughters. But Jesus is a proverbial "fork in the road"; once you encounter Jesus you have a choice of two roads - believe in Him and worship Him or to reject Him and experience judgment.

Beginning in the second half of this verse Jesus speaks of spiritual blindness, or more precisely humanity's **awareness of our spiritual blindness**. "Those who do not see" refers to those who are spiritually blind and know it, people like the man blind from birth. Jesus came so that such people "may see." "Those who see" are those who think they have spiritual sight but don't, people like the Pharisees. Jesus came so that such people may become blind (confirmed in their blindness). The Pharisees listening to Jesus understood that He was referring to them:

40 Those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things and said to Him, "We are not blind too, are we?" 41 Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

Notice again that Jesus is playing off of their own evaluation of themselves. The reality is that due to the fall (Genesis 3), we are all born in sin or "spiritually blind from birth." If they said, "We are blind, so open our eyes that we might see," they would have no sin. Like He did to the man blind from birth, Jesus would open their eyes and they would see Him for who He was. But "since [they] say" [this was their own evaluation of themselves] "We see," Jesus was of no use to them; they would continue to be spiritually blind and their sin would remain. [In Matthew 15:14 Jesus called the Pharisees "blind guides of the blind."]

Jesus woos us to Himself, but ultimately He defers to our own self-evaluation. And so *today's passage asks each of us: **Have you ever acknowledged your spiritual blindness?***

We really only have two options. **One option is to be like the Pharisees** who were offended at the insinuation that they were spiritually blind; they would rather go to hell than admit that Jesus was the Son of Man sent from God. They had their religion and their traditions and they weren't interested in what Jesus had to offer.

The **other option is to be like the man blind from birth**. Admit to Jesus that you are spiritually blind due to your sin, believe in Jesus as the One who died for your sin. In

response He will open your eyes and give you life. You become a new creature in Christ. But you have to let go of your pride, your control, your obsession with figuring everything out before you believe. Begin by admitting that you are spiritually blind.

If you have been brought low by your circumstances, humble yourself before God and admit that you are spiritually blind. If you allow Jesus to open your spiritual eyes, you will embark on a journey that will be difficult in ways you cannot predict. But you will have brothers and sisters who will walk with you and love you like family.

If you have already acknowledged that you have been “blind from birth” (i.e., sinful from birth) and have believed in Jesus as the only One who can take away your sin, ***the challenge is to maintain the same desperation and humility you had at the first.*** Jesus’ vision for us isn’t that we become self-sufficient and puffed up with pride because our eyes are open. His vision is that we say from the heart:

“I once was blind, but now I see solely because of the grace of Jesus. Because I was saved by grace, I will live by grace. Since God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble, I will humble myself under the might hand of God. I will abide in Jesus and let His words abide in me. By myself I can do nothing of value.”

That mindset leads to a satisfying life and a compelling witness. I want to give one example of how powerful it is in the lives of others when we maintain the desperation and humility of someone who “once was blind.” This may seem sort of random, but I think it makes the point: parenting. For obvious reasons, the influence of parents on kids is life-shaping. Parenting isn’t about technique; it’s about being the type of person whom your kids need to love, guide, discipline, befriend, counsel, etc. in every stage of life. There is nothing more compelling in the life of a kid (whether s/he is 5 or 25) than humility - heart-level humility of a person who says, “I once was blind, but now I see. . . and apart from Jesus I can do nothing.”

This type of parenting is relatively rare. Eugene Peterson convinced me years ago (in *Like Dew Your Youth*) that parenting should be like an apprenticeship. As the parents walk with Jesus, they let their kids look over their shoulder and see how they’re dealing with their sin and their disappointment, how they handle conflict, how they handle money. In other words, they let their kids see a humble walk with Jesus. That way of living is compelling.

But Peterson observed that many Christian parents are no longer humble and desperate for Jesus; they have stopped growing. Instead of an apprenticeship, their parenting is one long lecture. Instead of ***showing*** their kids a humble, winsome way of walking with Jesus, they’re only ***telling*** their kids how they should live.

This model of influence works in friendships, in discipleship/mentoring relationships, in the workplace, and in our conversations with people who need Christ. The challenge is ***to maintain the same desperation and humility you had at the first.*** That type of life is both satisfying and compelling.

## Notes:

1. The apostle Paul started out as a Pharisee. He hated Jesus and His followers. But Acts 9 tells us that while on the way to Damascus, “a light from heaven flashed around him,” knocked him to the ground, and blinded him for three days. When Paul believed in Jesus three days later, “immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized.” Jesus made him physically blind to correspond to his spiritual blindness; when he believed, his physical **and** his spiritual eyes were opened. Paul never would have admitted he was spiritually blind if Jesus hadn’t made him physically blind.
2. Jesus treats us according to our own evaluation of ourselves. We see this dynamic in Matthew 9. There the Pharisees asked why Jesus was eating with “tax-collectors and sinners.” Matthew 9:12 tells us:

12 But when Jesus heard this, He said, “It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. 13 . . . I did not come to call the righteous but sinners.”

Jesus responds to our own self-evaluation. They Pharisees declared themselves healthy/righteous, and so Jesus didn’t heal and forgive them. Alister Begg puts it this way: *“There is no cure for those who reject the only cure there is.”* By contrast the tax-collectors and sinners readily admitted that they were sick/sinful; Jesus was just the doctor they needed. Those are the people Jesus made well spiritually. Those who know they are sick and blind and dead in their sin find life and wholeness in Jesus. That’s why He came.