

“But Now I See!”

John 9

January 11, 2009

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Have you ever, as a child or maybe even as an adult, imagined what it would be like to be blind?

Maybe you closed your eyes and tried to walk through the house.

There are several children’s games, such as “pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey” where we blindfold someone, spin them around and then watch and laugh as the person stumbles and looks rather silly.

Intending no unkindness, blindness is a disability.

We use blindness as a metaphor in our everyday speech:

When someone doesn't understand something we might be tempted to ask, "Can't you see?" or less kindly, "Are you blind?"

In the biblical passage before us today, Jesus uses physical blindness as a metaphor for our spiritual condition apart from God’s gracious intervention.

Jesus’ healing of the man born blind is a favorite account in the Bible for several reasons:

- It displays the compassionate action of Jesus toward a man in great misery;
- It demonstrates the deity of Jesus in a unique way;
- It illustrates Jesus’ gracious and necessary intervention in our spiritual blindness;
- It demonstrates the necessary response of someone in whose life Jesus has intervened;
- It demonstrates the hardening mind and heart of those who refuse to believe;
- And not least, there is the humorous chutzpah of the formerly blind man when responding to his interrogators.

I want you to see and hear the incident reenacted in this video of the Gospel of John.

I want you to watch for three people in particular – Jesus, and the blind man and the Pharisee.

So first, I want you to watch for the strong evidence of who Jesus is. He is the Messiah, but even more Messiah than what the people expected, he is God.

But secondly, I want you find yourself in the story – are you the man born blind or are you the Pharisee?

Are you responding to Jesus or are you further hardening your heart?

John 9:1-41 READ or Watch Video

“God bless to our hearts the hearing of your Word.”

Toward the end of this account we read in 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.’”

Here we understand that Jesus has used the healing of the man born blind as a metaphor for what is happening in us spiritually.

We quickly recognize that not only was this an account of Jesus’ gracious healing of the man physically but it was also an enacted parable. (Carson, 377)

Yes, Jesus healed the man out of a mercy but that extended far beyond his physical sight and extends far beyond this man alone.

When Jesus and his disciples saw the man who had been blind from birth, “His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’” (9:2)

Their question revealed an understanding of suffering that was common in that day and persists to this day.

They even thought it was possible for a child to sin in the womb.

Therefore if someone is sick or poor it must be because they, or in this case possibly their parents, have done something wrong to deserve this judgment on them.

Even though the book of Job should have lain to rest such a limited view of the causes of suffering, Jesus must here declare that the man has been blind from birth for another purpose.

9:3 “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.”

It is true that suffering and death are the result of sin that has corrupted all creation. It affects all of us, without exception.

It is also true that sometimes suffering is the direct result and natural consequence of someone’s own sin as when a drunk driver maims someone else or himself.

It is also true that sometimes suffering and/or death is the punitive consequence of someone’s sin as when, in the book of Acts, Ananias and Saphira were struck dead for their sin.

But usually suffering and death are not the punitive consequence of any specific sin but the tragic result of a sin-corrupted universe.

But in this case there is even more going on.

Jesus says this man’s blindness was not the result of the specific sin of either the man or his parents but, again, “this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.

Jesus DOES say what has NOT caused the blindness, but he DOES **NOT** say what DID; instead he addresses **the purpose** of God behind it.

God is going to do something marvelous in this man and by it God will demonstrate a marvelous opportunity for others.

Someone wrote, “His blindness is not a punishment but a possibility.” (Michael Card, *The Parable of Joy*, 123)

Another said the man was a miracle prepared and waiting to happen.

Before creation, this incident was planned so that the glory of God in Christ could be manifested. John

MacArthur from sermon on John 9:1-12

So the first point I'm getting at is that this whole incident happened and was recorded by John so that, among other things, we would see the glory, the deity of Jesus.

Jesus actually states that purpose early in the account when he said in verses 4-5 "As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

Later Jesus would say it this way in John 12:35-36 "Then Jesus told them, "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light... ³⁶ Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light."

Jesus knew that he had a specific amount of time on earth and that he must stay focused on demonstrating who he is and accomplishing the sacrificial work he came to do.

It is this "demonstrating who he is" that is in the foreground here.

Earlier in chapter 8 Jesus had introduced this subject when he said, 8:12 "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Now here in chapter 9 he repeats that theme and then proceeds to demonstrate that theme by a physical and spiritual healing of the man born blind.

It seems to me that Jesus is the main subject of this entire incident.

Not only does Jesus intimate that he intends to use this incident to demonstrate that he is the light of the world, but throughout the encounter Jesus is the subject.

After the man was healed we read:

John 9:10-11 “How then were your eyes opened?” (the neighbors) demanded. ¹¹ 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.”

Later when the man was interrogated by the Pharisees, they declared in verses 16-17 “This man (Jesus) is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” But others asked, “How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?” So they were divided. ¹⁷ Finally 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.”

When the man was interrogated again we see that Jesus is still the subject. 9:24 “A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. ‘Give glory to God,’ they said. ‘We know this man (Jesus) is a sinner.’”

To which the healed man later responds, 9:32-33 “Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. ³³ If this man (Jesus) were not from God, he could do nothing.”

It is true that there are no incidents of sight being restored to the blind in the OT.

Nor will you find any of the disciples of Jesus in the book of Acts able to heal the blind.

But with Jesus that miracle is more common than any other.

When Jesus performed this miracle of giving sight to the blind he was intentionally fulfilling the role of the expected Messiah.

The prophets had predicted that the Messiah would do these things.

- Isaiah 35:5-6 “Then will **the eyes of the blind be opened** and the ears of the deaf unstopped. ⁶ Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.

- Isaiah 42:6-7 “I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, **7 to open eyes that are blind**, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.”

Giving sight to the blind was something only God could do.

Matthew 11:2-5 “When John (the Baptist) heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples ³ to ask him, ‘Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?’ ⁴ Jesus replied, ‘Go back and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵ **The blind receive sight**, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor...’”

It is precisely those miracles that John records to prove the point: This Jesus is the Messiah of God; he is God. [Hengstenberg in Ryle, John, ii, 156]” From Robert Rayburn, Sermon on John 9:1-41.

In the midst of the movement and people of this story, let us not miss the most significant thing here.

Who is the one everyone else is talking about? Jesus!

Look at what he does, he uses the saliva of his own body and the dust of the earth he created and he miraculously heals a man who was not only blind but had been blind from birth.

Again the healed man’s testimony is powerfully true: verses 32-33 “Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”

This Jesus whom we are asked to trust is God of creation and re-creation.

Earlier I said I want you to watch three people:

First, I wanted you to see Jesus for who he truly is – Messiah God.

But I also said I want you to watch for yourself in the story – are you the man born blind or are you one of the Pharisees?

Are you responding to Jesus or are you further hardening your heart?

So let's look at the Pharisee next.

- Please remember he is not a pagan.
- Also he is not an atheist.
- This is a religious man.

And when the Pharisees brought the formerly blind man in for a second interrogation this is what they said, 9:28-29 "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 problem is that the Pharisee mixed error and truth in his religion and wound up with an adulterated religion.

Oh, he believed in God all right, but he refused to follow Jesus.

Oh, he had a set of moral laws all right but the problem was that he actually thought by following them (even when he wasn't) that he was okay with God.

The Pharisee had already decided that his religion was sufficient.

Remember **how** the blind man's parents knew the attitude of the Pharisees?

V. 22 "The Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue."

So here's the Pharisee:

- He sits week after week hearing and maybe even teaching the Word of God but it doesn't shape his life.
- He hears about trusting Jesus but he trusts himself.
- He hears about obeying Jesus but he runs his own life.
- He hears about investing in the kingdom of God but he spends his time and money on things that are of greater interest to him.

Now don't get me wrong, his counterpart today is also not a "heathen."

- He attends church fairly regularly, he gives some money to United Way at work and even to God's kingdom work through the church, he has sung in the choir, he has an orthodox faith believing in God as Trinity, Jesus as Messiah, and the incarnation, atonement, resurrection and second coming.
- He has an unwritten list in his head of what he is supposed to believe and what he is supposed to do to consider himself a Christian and hope he'll be okay with God when he dies.
- He would be quick to disagree with anyone who espoused doctrines contrary to his orthodox views.
 - If someone questioned the virgin birth of Jesus, he'd be the first to defend it.
- And he would be quick to criticize anyone whose lifestyle contravened what he considered to be a Christian lifestyle.
 - He has no time for drunks or adulterers.

Compared to many men he's a good man.

He provides for his family, he's faithful to his friends, he contributes to the community and is very likeable.

He regularly hears about Christ being Lord of our lives but he sees no incongruity between the way he lives his life and what being a Christ-follower means.

The story is told about a man who claimed that he "got religion."

An old crony who knew about his shameful past heard the news, called him on the phone, and said, "Joe, they tell me you've got religion."

"I sure have," came the reply.

His friend responded, "Then I suppose you'll be going to church every Sunday."

"That's right," Joe affirmed, "I started 5 weeks ago and haven't missed a service since."

"And I suppose you're going to quit smoking and drinking."

"Already have," Joe replied. "In fact, I haven't smoked a cigarette or touched a drop of liquor since that day."

His friend paused for a moment, remembering how much money Joe owed him, and then said with an intended jab, "I suppose too, now that you've got religion, you're going to pay up all your old debts."

At that point Joe exploded and exclaimed, "Now wait a minute! That's not religion you're talking about; that's business!"

This is always the problem with religion it may change the outside, but it can never cure the problem of the heart.

Alan Carr at http://www.sermonnotebook.org/new%20testament/John%209_1-11.htm

Many years ago one man wrote, *"Such religion (as the Pharisees had) was purely intellectual, something which they venerated as a religious tradition handed down by their forebears; but it neither moved their hearts nor affected their lives. And that is the real test of a man's orthodoxy. An orthodox creed, intellectually apprehended, counts for nothing if it fails to mould the life of the one professing it. I may claim to regard the Bible as the inspired and infallible Word of God, yea, and be ready to defend this fundamental article of the faith; I may...pride myself on my doctrinal soundness—as did these Pharisees. But of what worth is this if I know not what it means to tremble at that Word, and if my walk is not regulated by its precepts? None at all! Rather will such intellectual light serve only to increase my condemnation."* A.W. Pink commentary on John 9

The "light of the world" was in their very presence.

The healed man, the neighbors, and even the man's parents testified to the miracle that had taken place.

But by their refusal to see the light, the Pharisees, who were convinced they could already see, only made themselves more blind.

Again hear Jesus' words in 39-41 "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who (think they) see will become blind." ⁴⁰ Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?" ⁴¹ Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains."

Spurgeon wrote, “It is not our littleness that hinders Christ, but our bigness. It is not our weakness that hinders Christ, but our strength. It is not our darkness that hinders Christ; it is our supposed light that holds back his hand.” (Spurgeon, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Vol 30, p489)

And still another man wrote, “Those satisfied with their own condition were the ones condemned to remain in it.” (Keener, 796)

Earlier Jesus said, John 3:19-20 “This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.”

Are you a Pharisee – you have religion or spirituality, as they like to call it today, but you don’t have Jesus?

Or you say you believe in him but you don’t follow him?

Or, looking at the third person in our text, are you the man born blind?

9:1 “As (Jesus) went along, he saw a man blind from birth.

A blind man in that day was a desperate man.

No job, no marriage, and no future.

He was led by others or stumbled through on his own.

There was no Americans for Disabilities Act.

It was a miserable, even tragic life.

In this man’s case no one cared for him; he was a beggar.

The man had been blind from birth.

Knowing how Jesus was using this incident to speak spiritual truths, we understand, as we are taught throughout Scripture, that we are sinners from conception.

We are taught in Romans 5 that we sinned in Adam and thus we are sinners by nature.

And in Romans 1 we are taught that we are sinners by action.

From conception we are sinners and we act out our sinfulness every day.

And in Ephesians 2:1 we read, “You were dead in your transgressions and sins.”

Remember, the blind man wasn't seeking Jesus.

He didn't ask to be healed; he didn't believe in Jesus, he was blind spiritually as well as physically.

As the Bible teaches in 2 Corinthians 4:4, “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

Like the Pharisees, even if that man had physical sight, he would not have seen the image of God in Christ.

Sin blinded him and it blinds us.

That is why Jesus said in John 6:44 “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him...”

The blind man didn't see Jesus but Jesus saw him.

And Jesus reached down into his world and in tender compassion not only opened his eyes but opened his soul.

It is when **Jesus** takes the initiative that something happens.

He initiates, he enables, Jesus calls and then we are able to respond.

I've quoted it before several times, but it is so appropriate again in this context:

What you see happening in the experience of this man is what the old theologians called “effective calling.”

“Effective calling is the work of God's Spirit whereby convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ and renewing our wills, he both persuades

and enables us to embrace Jesus Christ as he is offered to us in the Gospel.”

Why didn't the blind man refuse Jesus' advances (mud on the eyes, for heavens sake!)?

Just as today, hadn't many people already burdened him with what he needed to do to get better or to cope with his blindness?

I'm sure miracle cures were promoted then as now.

Instead the Spirit of God awakened in the blind man a hope in Jesus. And instead of the stubborn refusal of the Pharisees, this man responded in simple obedience.

Jesus said go and he went.

I think the account is quite clear that the man wasn't a Christian at that point but God was drawing him and the man was responding.

I'm quite convinced that what many people refer to as being born again when they are very young is really this first work of God's Spirit drawing them to the Savior.

And if it is God, it will bear fruit.

Jesus said, John 6:37 "All that the father gives me will come to me."

But that initial work of God drawing the blind man was not yet completed.

Called on the carpet by the Pharisees, the man testifies to what happened to him but doesn't really know who Jesus is.

Jesus is not finished with him and again Jesus took the initiative.

I think there is reason to believe that just as many people today, who have a profound experience, this man would have been content for his experience with Jesus to end where it did.

All his life he would have told about this miracle and maybe he would even have said it made him more spiritual.

But he never would have known Jesus if Jesus hadn't continued to draw him.

9:35-38 “Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, Jesus said, ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’³⁶ ‘Who is he, sir?’ the man asked. ‘Tell me so that I may believe in him.’³⁷ Jesus said, ‘You have now **seen** him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.’³⁸ Then the man said, ‘Lord, I believe,’ and he worshiped him.”

When, exactly, did the man become a “Christian”?

We don’t know but it is apparent that he is so by v 37 when the man declared “‘Lord, I believe’ and he worshipped (Jesus).”

But God began the process in that man before the creation of the world.

Remember Jesus said this man’s blindness was “so that the work of God might be displayed in his life”?

Then we see Jesus finding the man back in verse 6 and then continuing to intervene in v 35 until it culminates in knowledgeable and full-fledged faith in Jesus.

Becoming a Christian is often like that.

It seems that Paul’s dramatic conversion experience is much less common than the slower-over-time conversion of others.

Theologically and logically there must be a point in time when one is converted but knowing exactly when that is is difficult to discern because it feels more like slowly awakening rather than being instantly aware.

The man born physically blind and spiritually blind can now “see” both physically and spiritually.

The Pharisee who was also born spiritually blind remained spiritually blind.

Which are you?

A member of our church has written:

“Before I became a Christian, I was a follower of Ayn Rand, an avowed atheist.

In the early 60s as a college student and later as a young professional, her philosophy had great appeal for me. It was logical and reasonable - and it fed my ego. As a person, I was proud and arrogant, self reliant and self centered. Like the Simon and Garfunkel song of that era said - I was a rock, I was an island - I NEEDED no one.

Then, at the age of 26, a funny thing happened.

My sister and my brother-in-law, who had recently become Christians, were praying for me, as were people in their church **and God was making His move.**

A job change required a move from Pittsburgh to Denver.

I left my parents and nearly everyone I knew and I came to a place where I knew no one.

It was the Christmas season, I was all alone and **God had me right where He wanted me.**

Through a God directed set of circumstances, I found myself in an evangelical church listening to the Gospel and the "Hound of Heaven," as Francis Thompson called Him, caught up with me.

The challenge was given - choose THIS day whom YOU will serve.

Choose either the empty, impotent gods of Rand's philosophy or the living, powerful, loving God of the Bible.

I had seen enough of the selfish, cold and egotistical life I had led.

And I chose - But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

Has Jesus intervened in your life and thinking?

Has he drawn you, called you, and wooed you to himself?

How have you responded?

Will you trust him?

Charles Wesley

“He left His Father’s throne above
 So free, so infinite His grace—
 Emptied Himself of all but love,
 And bled for Adam’s helpless race:
 ’Tis mercy all, immense and free,
 For O my God, it found out me!

And can it be that I should gain
 An interest in the Savior’s blood?
 Died He for me, who caused His pain—
 For me, who Him to death pursued?
 Amazing love! How can it be,
 That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
 Fast bound in sin and nature’s night;
 Thine eye diffused a quickening ray—
 I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
 My chains fell off, my heart was free,
 I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

No condemnation now I dread;
 Jesus, and all in Him, is mine;
 Alive in Him, my living Head,
 And clothed in righteousness divine,
 Bold I approach th’eternal throne,
 And claim the crown, through Christ my own.”

John Newton:

“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.”

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