

Healed and Sent

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Date: 15 March 2026

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[0 : 00] Over the past few years, I have become intimately acquainted with Interstate 76. Interstate 76 is an interstate in southwestern Pennsylvania on your way to Pittsburgh if you're driving from here to Pittsburgh. My wife grew up in Pittsburgh and my in-laws still live there.

So in the past few years I've driven that road many times. And on one particular occasion when I was driving on Interstate 76, one of the first times I was driving on this road, I saw a sign off to the right. And the sign said, remove your sunglasses now. It was a sign that I had never seen before on the road and so I just kind of laughed at it. I was like, that's kind of a silly sign.

Like, I'm not paying attention to that. And it was a sunny day. You know, it was a sunny day. I had my sunglasses on. I'm like, I'm not removing my sunglasses. The sun's out. And then just a few minutes later as I'm coming around a curve, I realized why the sign was there. Because we were about to enter a very long tunnel. If you've ever driven Interstate 76, you know about the Allegheny Mountain Tunnel. It's a long tunnel that goes underneath and through Allegheny Mountain. And I realized the sign on the road wasn't silly. It was actually meant to be helpful. The sign to remove your sunglasses was actually a warning to drivers about blindness. Because if you have sunglasses on while you're going into a tunnel, your vision could dangerously be impaired. Things could get really dark really quickly. And so the sign was there as a warning against blindness. Our passage in John chapter 9 this morning functions very similarly to that sign. It's a warning against spiritual blindness. And if you read this story on first glance, you might think that this story is about one blind person. But if you study it a bit more, you realize it's actually about multiple blind people. If you read the whole chapter, John chapter 9, you realize you have the man who's physically blind. But then you have people who are spiritually blind, the disciples and the Pharisees. And so in the midst of this story, that's a warning about blindness. It's about physical and spiritual blindness. We meet Jesus who claims to be the light of the world.

The light of the world. And so that's the question that we're going to look at this morning. In a world of spiritual and physical blindness, what does it mean for Jesus to be the light of the world? What does it mean for Jesus to be the light of the world? We're going to see three things.

That as the light of the world, what it means for Jesus to be the light of the world is that wherever Jesus goes, he exposes. Wherever Jesus exposes, he heals. And wherever he heals, he says. So let's look at those in order.

[3 : 12] First of all, wherever Jesus goes, he exposes. So verses 1 and 2 tell us that one day as Jesus was kind of walking along with his disciples, they notice off to the side a man blind from birth.

And the disciples ask Jesus a question, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind? And this sounds like a really strange, silly question to modern ears. You know, why are they asking this question? There's a couple of possibilities. We don't actually know exactly what's motivating this question because John doesn't tell us. There's a couple of possibilities. One, it's possible they're misreading and misinterpreting the Old Testament. There are places like in Deuteronomy chapter 5 where God says that he will punish the sin, that he will punish the sin from parents onto their children. Punishes the children for the sins of the parents, sorry. But that would be taking that verse out of context. It would be misreading it because that particular section is about people who abandon and reject God's covenant. So God doesn't do that indiscriminately with everybody.

Or perhaps they're thinking about a few chapters earlier in John chapter 5 after Jesus heals a man who can't walk. And after he heals him in John chapter 5, Jesus says, stop sinning or something worse may happen to you. So there's a couple of possibilities for why the disciples are thinking this, what sort of motivates them to ask the strange question. We can't be exactly sure. But regardless, they are making an assumption about the reasons for this, about the reasons for this man's

suffering, the reasons for this man's blindness. And the assumption is, is that the reason for his blindness was sin, either his sin or his parents sin. And this is very similar to the idea of karma in religions like Hinduism and Buddhism.

And although karma looks differently in Hinduism than it looks in Buddhism, they share the same principle in karma that if someone is experiencing suffering, if they're experiencing an affliction like blindness, then they are likely deserve it. They likely deserve it because they are experiencing the consequences for sins in a previous life. It's connected to this idea of reincarnation, that we live multiple lives.

And so functionally, the disciples are, even though they're Jewish, they're operating with a karmic assumption. They're operating with the assumption that if you're suffering, you're getting what you deserve. You're paying for the consequences of your sins. And even if you're even people today who are not Hindu or Buddhist, this is actually a popular conception, this idea of karma. And so is this, is the idea of karma right? Is that how the universe works? Well, how does Jesus respond? He says in verse three, neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. And here we see that Jesus is exposing the disciples' blindness. He's exposing the blindness of the disciples' theology of suffering. Now we don't have time to do a deep dive into a biblical theology of suffering this morning, but we should at least take time to reflect on what Jesus is saying here. Contrary to the idea of karma, the Bible teaches that the reasons for suffering are always complicated and they are always a mystery. On a macro level, we can say that all suffering is in some ways related to human sin because we live in a fallen world that has been broken by sin and death and where suffering exists. So on a macro level, there is a sense in which suffering is related to sin. It's a consequence of living in a fallen world. But on a micro level, it's important to realize the Bible does not give us permission in any particular instance to know with any degree of certainty the reasons for an individual's suffering, either our own or someone else's. [7 : 30] That is a deep mystery that we leave only to God. And this is something that you find out, by the way, if you read the book of Job. And you find that Job's friends who are trying to give Job the reasons for his suffering are incredibly unhelpful and annoying. The Bible teaches that lots of people suffer in ways that are entirely unrelated to their sin. Lots of people suffer unjustly. The Bible teaches we will only really be able to fully understand the problem of suffering and evil one day at the end of history when Jesus comes and makes all things new. That's the only time where we'll really only be able to understand the problem of evil and suffering. Until then, it in many ways remains a deep mystery.

And so the reasons for suffering biblically are they're complicated, they're a mystery. Lots of people suffer unjustly all the time. And just as a side note, the kind of practical outcome of all of this, this theology of suffering, is that wherever we see physical affliction and suffering, we should always respond with great compassion. With great compassion. Because our working assumption should be that wherever we see people suffering with physical affliction, that this is a person made in God's image, who, like me, is living in a fallen world. And they're just like me. That should be our working assumption. And this is what Jesus is saying to his disciples. This is what he says to them. Neither this man sinned, nor his parents. This man is living in a fallen world, just like you. Showing. And the thing is, because the disciples are blind, showing compassion is exactly what the disciples don't do. It's exactly what they don't do. Because they have this major blind spot. They have this blind spot in their theology of suffering, and Jesus exposes it. So that's the first thing that we see, that wherever Jesus goes, he exposes our blind spots. You know, part of what it means to be a blind. Sin makes us blind to the truth about God. It makes us blind to the truth about ourselves. And it makes us blind to the truth about others. On our own, we don't, and we can't see the world accurately. We all have blind spots in our thinking, our living, our habits, our relationships. And so we need Jesus, the light of the world, to come and expose and shine his light into our hearts, into our minds, into our relationships, and to illuminate the places that we need to grow and change and repent.

The good news is that in a Christian life, Jesus doesn't do this all at once. I mean, imagine if when you became a Christian, Jesus showed you all of your sin and all of your blind spots all at one time. [10 : 34] At least for me, that would be incredibly overwhelming. It would wreck me. I would not be able to stand that. Jesus is gracious. He, over time, gradually shows us more and more of our blind spots in our sin.

And he's gracious with us. He's gracious with the disciples. And he exposes our blind spots over time in a way that our humanity can actually handle. And practically what this means for the Christian life is that we need to continually come to Jesus in prayer, asking him to graciously expose our sin and to reveal our blind spots. And I don't know if you noticed, but our liturgy every Sunday actually trains us to do this. Our liturgy trains us to do this. In our confession, which we just sung earlier, in our confession, we confess things that we have done.

And we confess things that we have left undone. Let me ask you a question. What percentage of things that you have left undone are you fully aware of?

How many of those things are you aware of? If you're like me, it's not many. If you're like me, that the percentage that I'm unaware of is far greater than the things that I am fully aware of.

I have blind spots. We all have blind spots. So even in our confession, we're actually naming the fact that we don't see everything. We don't see our hearts fully. We don't see God fully. We need Jesus to come and expose our blind spots. This is also why we need great Christian friends.

[12:16] Good Christian friends help us to see our blind spots. I think whenever we're in the midst of a major decision or we're struggling with something or we're processing something, part of our question to our Christian friends is, hey, I know you love me. This is how I'm thinking about this. Can you help me see my blind spots? I'm assuming I have blind spots. Can you, what can you help me see?

And so whether it's our thinking, our habits, our ways of relating with others, we need Jesus to come and shine his light into our hearts and lives and to expose the places that we need to grow and change and repent. So that's the first thing we see. What does it mean for Jesus to be the light of the world?

It means that wherever he goes, he exposes our blindness. The second thing we see is that where Jesus exposes, he also heals. Where Jesus exposes, he heals. Verse three, neither this man sinned or his parents, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. The reasons why God allows suffering are a great mystery, but in a fallen world broken by sin, one of the reasons why sometimes God allows suffering is to put his power and his glory and his grace on display.

And Jesus is saying, this is true of this man. This happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. Verse four, as long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming when no one can work. And while I am in the world, I am the light of the world. This nighttime that Jesus is referring to is he's referring to his own passion and suffering and death. And Jesus is saying, before I go to the cross, before my own suffering and death, I'm going to be busy with the work that the father gave me to do, including what I'm about to do right now, what I'm about to do right now, which is to bring light and healing into the world and to put God's power on display in this man's life. Verse six, after saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with saliva and put it on the man's eyes. Go. He told him wash in the pool of Siloam, which means sent. And so the man went and washed and came home seen. Now this story is simultaneously really powerful and really strange. Jesus heals a blind man and gives him the ability to see. That's amazing. That's incredible. Praise God. What's not so amazing is how he does it. How does he do it?

[15:04] He spits into the dirt. He makes a nice little mud paste with his hands and he puts the mud paste on the man's eyes. Can you imagine being this man? Like, Jesus, what are you, what are you doing? Like, this is really gross. Like, this is a really strange scene. I think, uh, I have to admit that I think out of all of the things that Jesus does in the gospels, this ranks among the weirdest. Um, it's kind of socially awkward thing to do. Um, and so why does, you know, why does he do this? Because, you know, if you think about it in other places where Jesus performs miracles, you know, sometimes he can just heal with a word. He can just say a word and he heals somebody. So it begs the question, like, what's with the mud pie? In verse 14, if we continue to read, John tells us that this scene here is happening on the Sabbath. And in Jewish law, uh, both the actions of spitting and of making clay from dirt were both prohibited on the Sabbath. So in one sense, Jesus is showing his authority over man-made Sabbath traditions, uh, which is actually something he does a lot when he performs miracles.

He's showing his authority over the Sabbath. But again, Jesus could have shown his authority over the Sabbath some other way. Uh, so why does he, why does he do this? What's with the mud pie? Where else in the Bible do we see a man, dirt, and the power of God? Where else do we see a man, dirt, and the power of God? How about Genesis 2 verse 7? Then the Lord God formed a man

from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

The very creation of the first man, just as God created the first man from the dust of the ground, so he is recreating this man from the dust of the ground. By restoring his ability to see, Jesus is restoring and healing his humanity. He is bringing about his new creation in this man's life.

Imagine all of the ways that seeing would have allowed this man to more fully experience his humanity. He's never before seen his family or his friends. And now he can see their faces and see their facial expressions. Um, he's never been able to see the sunset of a, of a tree or a mountain or a flower or, or anything in God's creation. And now he can see the beauty of God's creation.

[17 : 55] He's never been able to read the Torah in Hebrew. And now he can read God's word.

Um, he's never been able to work and have a job and now he can work and earn a living and, and, and, and go about meaningful work. He no longer has to beg. And so here's what Jesus is kind of disgusting mud pie shows us. It's that when Jesus heals someone, he's not just performing a party trick.

He's not just showing off his divine power. He is doing the work of recreation. He is restoring their humanity. And this is what Jesus does as the light of the world. Light exposes, it shines into dark places, but light also heals. It heals. We know from science that sunlight and other kinds of light do all kinds of amazing things for our brains and our bodies. Sunlight brings vitamin D to our skin.

Yeah. Sunlight brings, it helps our brains produce serotonin, uh, something that regulates our brains. It regulates our mood and our mental health. As the light of the world, Jesus brings his light, not only not to, uh, Jesus exposes our blind spots, not to shame us.

Not to out us, but to heal us, to heal us. And this is the goal of confession in the Christian life to kind of come, come back to that for a moment. If you look at the prayer book, confession is actually under a subset of something called the rights of healing.

It's under the rights of healing. So whether we're confessing our sins during worship that we just did a moment ago, whether we're doing confession with a pastor or whether we're confessing our sins to a Christian brother or sister, confession is always an invitation to experience the healing power of Jesus. We bring things into the light of the presence of Christ because his light isn't just an exposing light. It's a healing light. Verses that we read just, just earlier, first John one, seven through nine.

If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus, his son purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. That's spiritual blind. Spiritual blindness is admitted is believing that we actually don't have sin, that we don't have darkness. But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

[20 : 50] What might God want to expose in your heart this morning? What blind spots may he be wanting you to see?

How might he be leading you to walk in the light through confession? Perhaps some things to reflect on this morning and throughout the week, whatever it is, wherever Jesus is shining the light into your heart and mind, he's drawing you into the light, not just to expose you, but to bring healing into your life in order to restore your humanity.

Just like this man, he is bringing about the work of new creation into your life. So that's the second thing we see. Where Jesus goes, he exposes our blindness.

Where Jesus exposes our blindness, he heals our humanity. And finally, where Jesus heals, he also sins. He also sins.

After putting the mud pies in the man's eyes, he tells him to go and wash in the pool of Salome, which John makes this editorial comment and he tells us that Salome is a word that means scent.

[22 : 11] And this Greek word is actually where we get the English word for missionary. From the Latin word, missus. And the name of this missionary pool called scent has a rich background.

The Greek name Salome comes from the Hebrew name Shiloh. And before the temple was built in Jerusalem, Shiloh was where God's presence dwelled among his people at the tent of meeting.

And all over the Old Testament, God promises that after the exile, his presence is going to be restored to his people like it was at Shiloh. And that the glory and the presence of Shiloh would be restored when he would send his servant.

When he would send someone who would be, according to Isaiah 42, a light to the nations, a light to the world. A scent one who, according to Isaiah 42, among other things, would open the eyes of

the blind.

And I think John knows exactly what he's doing. And he's picking up on all of this. And he's trying to show it to us.

[23 : 25] Because all over John's gospel, he calls Jesus the scent one. And here in John chapter 9, we're meant to see that the scent one sends a blind man to be healed at a missionary pool called a scent.

Why does John care so much that we would know the name of this pool? Because John wants us to see who Jesus is.

And that where Jesus heals, he also sends. Where Jesus heals, he also sends. And if you continue to read the rest of John chapter 9, this is exactly what you see.

Throughout the rest of this chapter, this man is telling people about Jesus and what he did in his life. He is sent as a missionary. First to his friends and neighbors and then to the Pharisees.

And this man doesn't have any training. He doesn't have any sophisticated theology or a structured gospel presentation. But people are asking him what happened. And the guy just says, hey, I don't really know what happened.

[24 : 37] I don't really know anything about this guy other than his name is Jesus. But I once was blind. And now because of him, I can see.

I can see. It is a missionary proclamation about the healing and recreating power of Jesus. And the great irony of chapter 9, if you continue to read it, is that this man who was blind is telling his story to people who think they can see when in fact they are the ones who are blind.

They are blinded to the truth about who Jesus is and they are blind to the truth of God's power.

Where Jesus heals, he sends.

And friends, maybe this morning Jesus wants to show you that where he has brought about healing and growth and change in your life, that in that place he also wants to send you.

He wants to give you a vocation. He wants to give you a mission in that place. Could it be that in the places of your struggle and your pain and shame, could it be that God in that place is where God wants to send you as a missionary to give you a vocation?

[26 : 05] Maybe in the past you have struggled with addiction or drugs or alcohol and you've experienced some progress and change and healing in that area of your life.

And maybe God wants you to help other people walk along the journey of recovery. Maybe you've been through a season of grief or loss in your life and God has brought healing into that place.

And maybe he's inviting you to consider walking alongside others in their grief and in their loss.

There could be any number of things here in this room.

I know it's been true of my life. I know that the places where I have often experienced the most pain and struggle have often been places where God provides opportunities for me to minister and walk alongside others.

Where Jesus heals, he also sends. It was true of the blind man in John chapter 9. It was also true of a man named John Newton.

[27 : 17] John Newton was an 18th century Anglican priest who, as a young man, made his fortune as the captain of a slave ship that carried slaves from the coast of West Africa.

And on one journey, his ship came across a terrible storm. And it seemed like the ship might sink.

There was water coming in. And Newton didn't think the ship was going to make it.

He didn't think that he was going to make it. And so he was, while he was bailing water from this ship in the middle of the storm, he cried out to God for mercy. But in reflecting later on this moment, he thought that he had sinned too much.

He thought that he had sinned too much for God to ever show him mercy, for God to save the ship or for God to forgive his sins. But as he's crying out to God for mercy and as he's bailing water from the ship, John Newton remembered the things that he had learned as a child about the free grace of Christ in Jesus.

And in the place of his own blindness and his own helplessness, as John Newton was bailing water from the ship, the light of the grace of Christ came into his heart.

[28 : 26] And it healed him and it changed him and it transformed him. And the ship eventually made it to shore. And over time, Newton realized not only was he blind to his own sin and his own heart, but he was also blind into how he had treated his fellow image bearers.

And so he abandoned the slave trade and he eventually trained to become an Anglican minister. And he would preach the gospel of grace for the rest of his life.

And eventually he would join Hannah Moore and William Wilberforce and many others to bring about the abolition of the slave trade in England. And he would later write a book called Thoughts on the African Slave Trade, where he exposed the evils of the slave trade, including exposing his own sins in an honest confession.

And John Newton would become one of the key witnesses in Parliament to the horrors and the realities of slavery. Where Jesus goes, he exposes.

Where he exposes, he heals. And where he heals, he sins. He sins. The man born blind lived this. [29 : 48] John Newton lived this. And we are invited to live it too. Later in his life, Newton would pen the words of one of the most famous songs ever written. About how Jesus, the light of the world, had come into his life and opened his blind eyes and healed him and sent him.

And I think because the words and the melody of Amazing Grace are so familiar, even to religious people, I think sometimes this song can sound cheesy or sappy.

But if you know John Newton's story, if you know John Newton's story, I think the words become a lot more powerful. Amazing Grace.

How sweet the sound. That saved a wretch like me. I once was lost.

But now I'm found. I once was blind. But now I see. Let's pray together.

[30 : 58] Lord Jesus Christ, light of the world. Come into our hearts and shine your light. Expose our blindness.

Expose our sin. Expose our faulty thinking and living. Come heal us and restore us and make us new. And show us where you are sending us into the very places where you've healed us.

And we pray this in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.