

Do You Believe?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 September 2024

Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 0 0] your guilt remains. So, through the summer, we've been thinking about some of these many questions that Jesus asked during His ministry, sometimes as He was teaching, sometimes with opponents responding to them, sometimes like here in conversation. And here is a vital question.

It's the trust question. We have it there in verse 35. Do you believe in the Son of Man? So, that's what we're going to be thinking about. But before we get there, to ask another question, where has all the controversy gone? Which may seem a surprising question, because every week, without fail, we will inevitably find a media storm of some kind. There will be a big announcement this week. It's the return of Oasis. Sometimes the media storm is because of a celebrity fallout.

Next week, because of Oasis. Sometimes it's a fall from grace, whether that's a politician or some kind of significant figure. And everybody seems to have an opinion. And lines are drawn.

Now, we come to John chapter 9, and we should get that in this text. We have a very public figure performing a very dramatic, high-profile act. There's a whole complex of different responses going on, and a storm of controversy among the leadership. Only this time, it's no celebrity.

This is Jesus, the one who John's gospel, who Jesus Himself has said, who is the Son of God, who is the eternal King, who is the light of the world, who is the only way to God, who is the Savior for the world. These are the claims that John's gospel makes, because these are the claims that Jesus makes.

[1 : 5 5] So, to say that, we might very well expect extreme reactions. To hear somebody say those kind of things about themselves, we would expect the kind of reactions we find in the text. Some confusion, some questioning, some interrogation, some fierce opposition.

So, my question is, where has all the controversy gone? Because truth be told, that's not what we see today, is it? The claims of Jesus remain the same. The character of Jesus remains the same.

But while some are very much for Jesus, and a few are very much against Jesus, for most people, it's a general apathy. There's no impact. There's no controversy about Jesus. It's as if He's not worth attention. Sometimes, perhaps even within the Christian church, we can become so familiar with the story. We put Jesus in a box, and we can easily lose sight of His glory and majesty, and we miss some of this gut reaction. So, we're going to enter into the controversy to help us to hear this last question from Jesus, and to think about ourselves. Do we believe? Three things to think about from our text. One, are we reading the signs? Two, have we investigated His identity? And three, will we trust Him? Do we trust Him? So, we begin with these first 12 verses. Have we read the signs?

John, in his gospel, doesn't record as many miracles as any of the other gospel writers. He records seven, and he calls them signs because they are signposts. They are pointers to Jesus' glory, His identity, and they help us to understand something about salvation. So, here in our story in verse 1, Jesus encounters a blind man. But as the chapter goes on, we discover that there's much more than just a physical blindness. Jesus also encounters spiritual blindness. There's a lot of spiritual darkness, even among the religious leaders. Well, as Jesus and His disciples walk along and they encounter this blind man, we also are invited to encounter and to discover two different types of logic that take place at the same time. There is the logic of legalism. Notice the disciples ask the question, who sinned? This man or his parents? Somebody must have sinned. They breathe the same air as the Pharisees. We thought about that last week. The disciples were raised listening to the teaching of the

Pharisees. And of course, the Pharisees will say to the man, you were steeped in sin at birth. That's their understanding. Same kind of understanding of how the world works and the religious system works that we find from Job's friends, his miserable comforters. Do good, and God will do good to you.

[4 : 51] If you live a good life, you will receive blessing. If bad things happen, it must be because you have done something bad, you must be under some kind of curse from God. They have that very narrow black and white way of looking at things. And so, they look at this man and say, well, life is bad, therefore he must be bad. So, there's the logic of legalism, but then Jesus brings the logic of grace.

Jesus, why is this man blind? So, that the works of God might be displayed in him. Jesus is going to come revealing the glory of God, bringing the grace of God, bringing healing, bringing spiritual transformation, and showing to him and to everyone around, and showing to us as well, Jesus' unique identity as the Son of God revealed in a saving way.

As the story goes on, Jesus says some wonderful things about himself. Look at verses 3 to 5, and notice these two big things that Jesus says of himself.

This happens so that the works of God must be displayed in him. As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Okay, so Jesus is saying, I do the works of God.

God. There's a sense of urgency. I must do this work. There's a sense of the closest personal connection between God the Son and God the Father that we are doing these works. This is the one who is closest to the Father's heart. We must do these works in the daytime before the night is coming.

[6 : 36] Jesus understands that his mission is leading to the dark night of the cross, but during the day, he wants to point people to himself as the way of salvation. So, he says, I do the works of God, and he says in verse 5, while I am in the world, I am the light of the world. He's already said that of himself in John chapter 8. Light as a symbol of God's presence, of God's glory, of God's purity, of God's revelation. Jesus in his public ministry is demonstrating and revealing the glory of God as he does the work of God in salvation, and here he anticipates that climaxing with his death on the cross. So, having made these bold claims, I do the works of God, and I am the light of the world, he then illustrates the truth with this miraculous sign. You can almost imagine people hearing these claims and saying, well, prove it, Jesus. It's easy to say. It's much harder to do.

So, what does Jesus do? After saying this, he spat on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, put it on the man's eyes, go wash. The man went and washed and came home seeing.

In a sense, it reminds us, doesn't it, of Genesis chapter 2, where we have that picture of God, the potter, getting his hands dirty in order to fashion the first man, Adam, from the ground.

Here we find the creator coming into the world and getting his hands dirty to make this mud pack for the man's eyes before the healing comes. And again, to bring us back to Genesis, here is the one who brings light out of darkness. Here is the one with power and authority on the one hand, and love and mercy on the other. It is the Lord who gives the blind their sight. Here is a statement of authority as he performs this miracle. And then we get to the reactions. The initial reactions are interesting, aren't they? Verses 8 to 12, the neighbors come along and they see the man, and they see there's something very different about him, and their conclusion, well, it must be his twin. And one of the things that we discover all the way along through John's gospel and in this chapter is how often people are blind to Jesus' identity and they cannot recognize that if he is the Son of God, he has the power to bring this kind of transformation. It's interesting as well to recognize the man's own reaction to Jesus. He doesn't understand immediately the significance of who Jesus is.

So in verse 11, he simply, when he's asked, how will your eyes open? The man they called Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. For him, the light is going to go on gradually. But at this stage, we see there's little theological knowledge. At this stage, there are not many people who are reading the signs correctly. And just to go back to sort of the big news about Oasis, maybe some of you saw the teaser sign that made it into the headlines, that cryptic clue a couple of days before that suggested they were reforming. And it was interesting as the papers began to pick up on it, some fans were obviously wise to it and started booking up hotels early, trying to plan and anticipate. Read the signs.

[10:14] For ourselves, when it comes to Jesus, do we see what Jesus' sign points to? The saving significance of who he is and have we acted upon it by believing in him? Because as we consider this sign, we need to recognize here is the power of God on public display. This isn't something done in a corner. This isn't something concocted by the writer of the gospel. Friends and enemies together must testify that Jesus has changed this man. And so, the question is, well, what better explanation is there?

It really does change everything if God becomes one of us and acts with the power of God in our world. Do we recognize, too, the contrast between the beauty of grace versus the ugliness of legalism?

Any system of religion that is bound up with, you must prove yourself and you must save yourself, will always tend to be harsh and judgmental and critical. But the beauty of grace hears Jesus say, I have come to save. I have come to give light to the blind. I have come to give life to those who are spiritually dead. Recognize, too, the reality that as Jesus walks into this man's story, here is the eternal Son of God, the Creator, personally entering into, involved in this one poor man's story.

What does that tell us about the heart of our God? We have this wonderful coming together of absolute authority and wonderful, tender, personal love. And also, and we'll come back to this, as Jesus performs this sign and as He thinks about the night that is coming, we need to recognize He is the Savior who will experience His own dark night of the soul. That darkness that He will experience as He becomes the sin bearer, as He experiences the wrath of God against sin, so that, not just this blind man, but so that you and I, by faith in Jesus, might live in the light. Have we read those signs and have we reacted and acted on them? Well, the second thing, and it's really the next part of the narrative, is this, have you investigated His identity? Because what we've got in verse 13 all the way to 34 are a series of investigations or interrogations. And again, this section really catches that storm of controversy that we see swirling around Jesus. We encounter groups on either side of the divide.

We encounter extreme responses. On the one hand, He's a sinner. On the other hand, He's a prophet, and indeed He's a Lord. And then we have the blind man who's caught in the eye of the storm.

[13 : 26] And as we listen, we recognize that John is showing to us that this once blind man's sight, spiritual sight, is getting clearer. In all the talking, as he reflects, he grows in understanding until indeed he becomes a worshiper. And again, these kind of reactions, this kind of investigation is what we would expect if Jesus is taken seriously. Maybe one of the hardest things we find is that there's a book called Apatheism and how to deal with it. How do we deal with the fact that most people around us just don't think He's worth bothering it with? That's a reminder that we need to pray, to pray that people would want to investigate. So, investigation number one, verses 13 to 18, the neighbors of this ex-blind man take him to the Pharisees. Ah, the spiritual leaders.

They'll be able to guide us. They'll be able to deliver the right verdict. This is something huge. So, let's go to our trusted authority. Sadly, once again, the Pharisees won't be able to guide them, right? It's interesting too as well, isn't it? In verse 16, we get the sense of a division that emerges within the Pharisees themselves. It's not uniform. So, there are some people who hear, well, Jesus did this on the Sabbath. So, anybody who works on the Sabbath is a Sabbath breaker.

He's a sinner. So, of course, he's not from God. But then there's the other group. Well, hang on a minute. He can't be a sinner because only God can do this. So, surely these signs are a pointer to God's power working. And so, there's a division. And so, they come and they ask the man.

Verse 17, what have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened. And the man replied, he is a prophet. Okay, so he's gone from the man Jesus to he's a prophet. He's God's man, sent from God, sent with God's Word. So, he recognizes the authority of God in what has happened.

They are, of course, not content to let it rest there. And a second investigation begins from verse 18 to verse 25. They actually didn't believe that he'd been blind. And so, they call in his parents to testify in this investigation. And here is where we get a sense of the fear of man that operates within Jewish society in Jesus' day, the rule of power, control, and fear by the Pharisees.

[16 : 11] We're told that his parents were afraid of the Jewish leaders because they decided, if anyone says Jesus is Messiah, Jesus is the promised Savior King, then we'll throw him out.

And to be thrown out of the synagogue was really to be cast out of society. Again, here in John 9, we're getting a window into something of the pressure that people from other faiths experience when they convert to Christianity. For those of you who are here, and we listen to our friend from Eritrea, if you live in a society where the majority of people, or a majority in a community, practice another religion, there can be an awful lot of pressure, fear, and control. So, we pray.

Listen in after they talk to the parents who say, well, we know he's our son, and we know he was blind. We're not going to answer your question. Ask him. He's of age. Listen to the pride as the Pharisees summon the man in once again. Verse 24, give glory to God by telling the truth. We know this man is a sinner. So, they're absolutely certain. We have made our verdict. And the only way that you can give glory to God is if you agree with us. So, you must agree with us that Jesus is a sinner, that he's an imposter, that by some kind of dark arts, he's made this transformation.

The man doesn't get brought into their theological debate. He replied, whether he's a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know, I was blind, but now I see. It's a wonderful thing, because what he does really is bring a testimony to them. And it's really hard to argue with this. My life was like this. I was blind. I was begging. I met Jesus. He spoke to me. He gave me a command, and now I can see.

Now my life is different. Everyone here is a Christian. We have a story that is like that. My life was like this.

[18 : 22] I came to discover Jesus as my Savior, and now I follow Him, and life looks like this. And we're invited to share that, to give Jesus glory. And sometimes our own stories can make an impact where the truth in the first instance doesn't always. But they're still not satisfied.

There's a third investigation from verse 26. And again, this ex-blind man is called in for further interrogation. But just to remind ourselves, the impression that we're getting here is that Jesus' identity really matters. These claims are not something that Pharisees say, well, okay, he's saying it, but you know, it'll all blow over. They recognize this is big. Sadly, they are wrong in his identity, and they're spiritually blind. And we get that irony that it's the blind man who has true spiritual sight.

In verse 28, they, you know, having claimed that they are disciples of Moses, they say, we know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from. And the man answered, now that is remarkable. And so he gives them a very logical set of steps. God doesn't listen to sinners. God listens to the godly. Nobody has ever opened the eyes of a person who's blind before. So if this isn't from God, what else could it be?

The blind man sees there is no other conclusion that can be drawn. This is clearly God's power. This is clearly someone who God honors and God works through. Jesus, therefore, must be from God.

At which point we see their ugly response, you were steeped in sin at birth. Consider him a worthless sinner, and they throw him out.

[20 : 26] A couple of things before we move to the last section, a couple of things that stand out. One, this is recognized in this section and in the man's story, the value of combining evidence with experience. So I say what the blind man does throughout these investigations, as his understanding grows, he speaks with growing clarity about who Jesus is. So he begins to bring truth. He doesn't yet know that Jesus is a Lord worthy of worship, but he understands that he clearly is sent from God and with the power of God. And so he lets the evidence speak for himself, for itself. But at the same time, he uses his personal experience to try and persuade others. So there's truth and there is testimony.

That's a really powerful combination. The truth of the gospel plus the testimony of people's transformed lives is one really important way for us as a church to help people to investigate Jesus' identity. We need people to see that Jesus and his claims are true, but also we need to see that Jesus and his claims are good. That he is somebody who is worth following. So there's that value of combining evidence and experience, but also there's the encouragement towards personal investigation.

Because I think there is that positive aspect that we want people to take Jesus seriously, to really encounter him and his claims, to not just write him off as an irrelevance.

Remember the way C.S. Lewis put it, the way that Jesus spoke about himself, his claims to be God, to forgive sin, to be Lord of the Sabbath, to be the one who would die and then rise. Somebody who speaks like this, he's either a liar and a terrible deceiver or a lunatic, someone with a significant problem, or he is the Lord. How can we help our family and our friends and our colleagues to be doing that, to be investigating his claims, to be taking them seriously?

Sometimes the best thing, the most straightforward thing to do is to invite them to church. Maybe that's some of our own stories, that it was an invitation to church out of the blue that led us towards faith. Sometimes we can read the Bible with them, take some time to talk through people's questions.

[23 : 06] If people like to read or like to listen, we can direct them to good books, to good podcasts. That's why we always like to keep well-stocked bookshelves if there's anything helpful for us, but for others as well. And we always want to be praying, don't we? To be praying that people who perhaps were apathetic or blind to the reality of how good and wonderful and life-giving Jesus is, that they would see.

So we encourage personal investigation. But with that, we come to our last point, and we actually come to our question, and it's the question of trust. Do you believe? What a day it's been for this man. Began the day in his usual space, still blind, still begging. Jesus came, now he can see, and then he's caught up in this huge media storm all around Jesus and his identity the day before. Unknown, unnoticed, disregarded by religious society as somebody unworthy of attention, somebody God would want nothing to do with.

And now today he finds himself under attack for his belief in Jesus, but at the same time he's met Jesus, and his life has been changed. He's got an amazing story. And then Jesus hears in verse 35 that he's been thrown out of the synagogue, and he seeks him out, and then he asks that vital question, do you believe in the Son of Man? And it's important to recognize, and I think especially where we are in history, it's not, do we believe that Jesus exists?

That's not the question that Jesus is asking. He's asking, do we trust? This is a faith question. This isn't a historical fact question. That's a really important question as well. But we can believe that Jesus was alive, and that he died, and that he rose again, and still not be saved, and still not be his follower.

Jesus says, do you believe in the Son of Man? Was Jesus' favorite title of himself, a title drawn from Daniel's Old Testament vision, Daniel chapter 7, that vision in which a human figure comes into the throne room to the ancient of days, and he's sent with the authority of God to establish an everlasting kingdom with everlasting glory. And Jesus teaches so often through the Gospels, that's me, that's who I am, sent from heaven with the glory of God to establish the kingdom of God.

[26 : 03] The man's still a little bit fuzzy in his sight. Who is he? Tell me so that I may believe. And Jesus said, you have now seen him. In fact, he's the one speaking with you.

And the man said, Lord, I believe. And he worshiped. This Jewish man, who would have heard that we shall not, there's only one God, and you shall never worship an idol or an image.

And he worshiped. Immediately, as he hears that Jesus is the Son of Man, he bows down and worships him as the Lord. We have believing trust, we have heartfelt worship. Jesus has done the work of God.

He has been the light of the world for this man, both physically and spiritually, as he confesses the truth of Jesus' identity. Where are you and I at today with our understanding of the identity of Jesus?

And does our understanding of his identity cause us to trust him truly? Because there's a question that matters for a number of different reasons. Because of the reality of God. Now, we cannot understand Jesus without seeing him as God, as Lord. As the one who has come into this world to seek a people, to invite people to fellowship with the living God. He has come to give spiritual sight.

[27 : 40] He has come to be the way into relationship with God. We need to understand his divine identity, that he is God himself. And if we want life with God, we need to recognize that the only way to have that is by coming to Jesus and pressing in to Jesus.

So, the question of trust matters because of the reality of God. It also matters because of the reality of guilt. Jesus talks to the Pharisees who have decided on a negative verdict about Jesus. And he says to them, in effect, listen, to reject my claims is to be guilty of rebellion against God himself. It's a prideful rejection of the offer of salvation.

And if we say no to Jesus, he says, then you're still guilty and in sin. He came to give deliverance, but that requires faith. I came across a really interesting, striking reflection, actually, from Nietzsche, the atheist philosopher of the 19th century. He was the guy who proudly claimed God is dead and we killed him, the Enlightenment thinker. But he had this insight. He said, as he kind of spoke, thinking about what a post-Christian society would look like, he said, post-Christian society, we'll still live with a sense of sin and guilt that will always be there.

But he said, it'll be a society without any hope of redemption because we've got rid of Jesus. It's interesting. Nietzsche didn't care about that. But the reality is that for so many people living with a burden of sin and guilt without the story of Jesus, there's no prospect of redemption. And that's tragic. Because Jesus offers and promises both if we trust and worship him as Lord.

But the question of trust also is important because of the reality of grace. Remember back in verse 4, Jesus said that the night is coming. This sign was all about darkness giving way to light.

[29 : 56] And he anticipates that the work of the cross will be darkness giving way to light. We have the darkness of the cross where evil people conspire, where there is great injustice as Jesus, the righteous, innocent one, is crucified. That's darkness. There is a darkness that falls over the land for three hours as Jesus. As Jesus falls under the judgment of God. As he experiences the terrible wrath of God against sin.

As he stands in the place of sinners. But then light dawns. That first Easter Sunday light dawns because Jesus rises.

And we know that God is pleased with the finished work of Jesus. The sacrifice is accepted, which means for us.

If our answer, do you believe in me, is yes. If we respond to God's grace, then we have found forgiveness. And we have entered into relationship with God. And we are in the light.

So this question matters. Jesus' identity matters. It matters in this life. It matters for eternity. Do we believe? Do we believe? Do we trust him? Will we trust him with our lives?

[31 : 31] Let's pray together. Lord, our God, we thank you for... Amen.