

Light true sight and becoming more blind

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[0 : 00] All right, so we are back into the Gospel of John and we'll continue through this through the rest of our holiday time. John chapter 9. If you don't have a Bible, there are Bibles up on the back desk up there if you want to grab one.

But keep it open to John chapter 9 because we'll be working through that as I speak. Before I actually even get into it though and start talking about the passage, I'm going to make an observation about life that I think we can all pretty readily and easily see, perhaps even in ourselves.

Things like, have you noticed how a successful businessman sees his first million as a start and continues to work long hours even though they're well into the category of rich?

A billionaire even will continue to work long hours. A politician will go to battle for a lost cause.

A world record holding athlete will train and train and train again to beat their own record, pushing themselves to the point of exhaustion, to the point of body failure.

[1 : 15] Putting themselves to the absolute limit in order to beat their own record. Why do we do this? Why do we have this drive, a drive that actually pushes us to move further, to get that promotion, to work harder, to excel more and more in the different areas of life?

Where does this drive come from? Well, in an article by Tony Schwartz in the New York Times in May 2015, he actually says this, we want desperately to matter, to feel a sense of worthiness.

Once our basic human needs are met, he said, the biggest stressor that psychology has managed to throw up or the biggest threat to me, the most likely thing to produce the hormone cortisol, which is a stress chemical that starts your heart racing and all that sort of stuff, the biggest stressor beyond eating, drinking, shelter, is my social self, my social acceptance, my esteem, my status.

Or you could say my pride, my dignity, my respect. And because of this drive, and because it's so strong, we apply ourselves to achieving this end of esteem and status with incredible vigour.

Why? To feel good about ourselves, but more for everyone to look at us and wish that, well, they were like us too. There's some kind of comparison that goes on here too.

[3 : 01] It's not just me and myself competing against myself and trying to better myself. I'm trying to lift myself up compared to you. There's a comparison going on in which we judge each other.

As Christians, we do this all the time. You know, even as Christian parents, we don't want our kids playing with the rough kids. Oh no, we want them playing with the good kids. We send them to good schools so that I can actually mix with those good kids.

We encourage them toward a good education, push them to work hard, get a good job. We try to steer them away from the wrong partner when that time comes. We even spiritualise it.

We expect spiritual obedience to lead to blessing. And you know you do that because as soon as something rubbish comes into your life, you go, why God?

Why do we even ask that question? We expect spiritual obedience to lead to blessing. And we see blessing in terms of success. And we see success as the results of our effort.

[4 : 07] Into that scene and that mode of thinking enters a man born blind. Why was he born blind?

Well, there were theological answers to that question already floating around. Accepted answers. They're implied by the question that the disciples asked Jesus in verse 2. His disciples ask him, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?

Cause and effect. Someone must have sinned because he was born blind. But who? Worst case scenario, the man himself while he was still in the womb.

How did this work? Well, they thought, it appears, at least this is one of the ways that this might have happened, was that an unborn baby might actually participate in the sin of their mother.

So if the mother sinned, because the baby was present in the womb, then that child sinned along with the mother. So best case scenario, the people who are all, you know, looking at this sinner, this blind man on the side of the road.

[5 : 14] Best case scenario, people looking at this blind man and blaming his parents. Worst case, they're looking at him and judging him personally, thinking he is personally responsible for his blindness.

But either way, in their minds, sin leads to suffering. It's as easy as that. So, this blind man was a sinner from a family of sinners.

So this family were on the edge of the respectable sphere of life, the respectable social set. That's how people viewed them.

But Jesus, in his response, cuts right across the cause and effect view with his answer. If you look in verse 3, Jesus answers, It was not that this man sinned or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.

Sin can lead to suffering, and we can see that in John 5.14. You can look these up later. Just write them down. 1 Corinthians 11.30, they're examples. A specific sin can lead to specific suffering.

[6 : 23] Jesus doesn't take this off the board completely, but he does take it off the board as a general principle that you can then apply to everyone you see that's suffering. Oh, there's got to be a sin behind it. There are lots of reasons for suffering.

This one, says Jesus, isn't about sin. This man wasn't born blind because of sin. Not a specific sin, at least. And as Alex kind of pointed out, there's a, you know, what do we do with it then?

Why was he born blind? Well, it's possible that when Jesus says, but that the works of God might be displayed in him, it's possible that he's saying, well, he was actually born blind so that I could actually heal him at this point and show God's glory.

It's also possible, though, that Jesus is actually saying, you're looking at this whole thing the wrong way. The whole thing, the whole paradigm that you're viewing the world through is wrong.

The whole paradigm that you're viewing me and my ministry through is wrong. They are looking to condemn when they should be seeing, as Jesus does, an opportunity to save.

[7 : 33] If you look at John 3, verses 16 and 17, for God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believed in him would not perish but have eternal life. Then verse 17, for God did not come into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him.

Jesus didn't come into the world to condemn the world but to save the world. They're looking at this whole thing the wrong way. What God is doing right here, right now in Jesus' ministry should be about saving, rescuing, pulling people out of the darkness into the light.

That's exactly what this healing will do. It will reveal God. This healing is symbolic. It's a signpost pointing to God at work. So the next question that comes up is how was he healed?

And it gets a little bit of attention here. Again, Alex pointed that out. John records that Jesus spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva in verses 6 to 7. Then he anointed the man's eyes with mud and said to him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, which means scent.

Why the mud? Who knows? That's the best I can come up with to answer the question that Alex posed for me to answer. No idea.

[8 : 50] I do suspect though with the amount of irony and the amount of insults and things being thrown around in this particular account, I do suspect that Jesus does it to push the buttons of the Pharisees.

And I can't prove that. But then again, the other theories around it are equally unprovable, you know, speculative. One thing we do know though and one thing that does get an explanation is the pool.

The pool is significant. John tells us that its name means scent where Jesus is the scent one in this gospel. It's an important name in the context of what God has been doing throughout history and it's an important name in the context of what's actually been happening very recently in the gospel.

So in John 7, verse 37 to 39, we're right at the end of the Feast of the Tabernacles. And in 7, verses 37 to 39, Jesus actually interrupts this water-pouring ritual at the end of that feast.

He gets up and shouts, if anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.

[10 : 02] Now the water for that particular water-pouring ceremony was drawn from the pool of Siloam. So yet again, Jesus is diverting their attention from the things of the past that they're celebrating to say this is the time of fulfillment here and now.

But further, if we go back to Genesis 49, which is the passage where each of the sons of Jacob are actually being blessed.

In Genesis 49, verse 10, we read, the scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

Now your versions probably have an alternate translation at the bottom. For the until tribute comes to him actually literally reads until Shiloh comes, where Shiloh is Hebrew for sent.

This could be Jesus' way of actually explaining who he is in the whole breadth of biblical theology, of Bible history. He is the eternal ruler, the one who the scepter would not depart from, that Judah has been awaiting.

[11 : 20] Jesus uses this miracle to reveal that God's work over thousands of years all connects into him and his arrival. It places Jesus right at the centre of it.

These revelations about Jesus are just waiting to be seen and pondered and understood, much in the same way that the understanding of this blind man grows gradually about who Jesus is throughout this account.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves, let's just stick with where we are now. And the fact is here that the neighbours of the blind man cannot get over the miracle that happens. How could this happen?

It was such an unbelievable thing they couldn't even agree that the healed man before them was actually the blind beggar they knew, their next door neighbour. And I love this part of the events because it asks all the questions I want to ask about that miracle.

Is it the same person or was it just a mistake? No, it's the same person. Well then, wow, how were your eyes opened?

[12 : 29] He says, Jesus made mud and told me to wash at Siloam. At this point, the neighbours know that you spit on the ground and make mud and rub it in someone's eyes.

That does not heal a man born blind. They know the pool of Siloam and whilst it's used in specific rituals, it is just water. They know it to be just water. So for them, the significance lies in who did this?

And so they ask that question, where is he? Where is this Jesus? And the man born blind goes, well, I don't know. He doesn't even know what he looks like at this point. But in all of this, things have changed for the man born blind.

He was the man who used to sit and beg. He was this outcast sinner. But through this encounter with Jesus, he's becoming someone new. But there's no Jesus to explain exactly what's going on.

And something this big needs explaining. So, they do what anyone would do. They go to the spiritual authorities, they know.

[13 : 40] They didn't have Google, so they went to the Pharisees. And the big question they had was who is responsible? Even though they go and delve into all the details of the actual miracle and how it happens, what they're really trying to do is determine is this from God or not?

Who is responsible? This miracle was too big to ignore. And this is kind of the thought that's going around in the friends of this guy's head, neighbours of this guy's heads.

Who could possibly do this? Who is responsible? So, in verse 13, they brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been born blind. And now we discover that it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes.

So, the Pharisees again asked him how he received his sight and he said to them, he put mud on my eyes and I washed and I see. Now, the Pharisees, in terms of understanding the law and the things of God, they were kind of at the top of the pile.

They're the spiritual elite in this community and embedded in this exchange is the information that the Pharisees need to make their decision from their perspective. Who is responsible? Well, straight away, a number of them start to think, not God.

[14 : 55] Jesus can't be. He can't be from their God because he doesn't keep their rules about the Sabbath. Now, note here, there is no rule in God's law against anything that Jesus did at this point.

What they're referring to is the extra laws that they'd added to the law. So, it was their rules, not God's rules, that Jesus had broken. Rules that they had added to establish and to make clear their own personal value to prevent them from sinning anymore.

Initially, there was some disagreement among them. Some of them were saying, well, he's a sinner and others were saying, well, how can a sinner do things like this? But ultimately, they were using different lenses at this point.

Some began with their own Sabbath rules and others began with a miracle and worked in to try and work out who it was. And they desperately needed to resolve this division because it was dividing them. And they couldn't have that.

It represented a break in their ranks, a break in how they actually achieve and understand personal value to be achieved, how they maintain their pride, their dignity, their respect, their status over everyone else in their society.

- [16 : 09] If they depart from the law at this point and their additions to it, then they diminish. And if Jesus becomes a competing voice, then they lose ground in their community.

So the Pharisees review the evidence but notice that they review the evidence not unbiased. They're very biased the way they review it. They ask the man his opinion in verse 17.

Who do you think he is? Straight back. He's a prophet. Now things really have escalated because if this is allowed to stand, then Jesus really does begin to compete with them.

And how can they compete with a man who can heal a man born blind? So they bring in some other people to try and bolster and check things out and make sure there are no loopholes here.

They bring in their parents in verses 18 to 23 and they say, is this your son? They say, yes. Was he born blind? Yes. How does he now see? We don't know. Now John gives us some important context at this point.

- [17 : 18] In verse 22 to 23 he explains that his parents said these things because they feared the Jews. For the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be the Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.

the Pharisees were already known to be against Jesus and the parents were already on the outside because they were perceived as sinners.

The fact that their son was born blind was a point of shame for them because this was the prevailing theology. Sin leads to suffering. Admitting it again in public life is being drawn into what would have been a very public trial was just rubbing their noses in the fact that they were on the outside.

It's equivalent to just being shown up as sinners again and again. And they'd lived under the weight of this theology for years at least since their child was born.

They were sinners. They knew there was no way back. Just a daily reminder. No wonder they caved when they were pressed to make an opinion about, form an opinion about Jesus.

- [18 : 26] So at this point they come back to the man born blind. Come back to the man in verses 24 to 34 and there's a really interesting exchange here and right in the middle of it things take a huge turn.

They come back to the man and they say give glory to God. Now just so you know what that means it's basically saying now tell us the truth. Give glory to God is a kind of I guess a sort of phrase that equated for what we would call being under oath in court.

that's all it's about. So he's saying tell us the truth and there's no question there's just a statement. We know this man is a sinner.

No question. Just their verdict on who healed him. In a nutshell they're saying God is not in it and what they're trying to force this man to do is to make a choice between them and Jesus.

Well the man responds he says look I have no idea about whether he's a sinner or not but one thing I do know that though I was blind now I see.

- [19 : 43] The man bypasses the sin debate and gets back to the point if you are right then please explain how he healed me. And they can't their own theology suggests that Jesus must be of God because only people who were in God's favour could do these things and as we read through what the man says back to them he's actually really quoting their theology back to them.

We know that in verse 31 we know that God does not listen to sinners but if anyone is a worshipper of God and does his will God listens to him. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind.

He's quoting their theology back to them and they are stuck. They have no way to deal with this. Only a truly godly man could do this miracle.

And they ask him again they try and point towards the sin behaviour in Jesus. Ah, but how did he make you know how did he heal you again? Ah, he made mud. Ah, he doesn't actually say that but that's what they're trying to draw out.

He answers them at that point look I've told you already and you wouldn't listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples? I've got to suggest here that this is actually mischief making here.

[21 : 03] He's starting to realise these guys are just so stuck in their ways they're not prepared to see what's right in front of them. This man was born blind but now he could see.

He has met Jesus. He has been healed. He has listened to people try and rubbish Jesus and has only convinced him of the truth. And so he chose Jesus. Do you want to become his disciples too?

The Pharisees could only respond by coming back to their rules. They kept judging God by their expectations. Their standards. Their way of life. The law was their way of life. It was how they built their self-esteem.

Their pride. Their reputation. So often it's the same for us. Our conduct is what we rely on to build our reputation. But this Jesus told them the truth.

Their way wasn't working. Any sin was a sign of slavery to sin. Jesus says in chapter 8. The law was a diagnostic tool not a rescue plan.

[22 : 09] Jesus is the rescue plan. Let me say this again. The law is not a diagnostic tool. Is a diagnostic tool not a rescue plan.

You cannot resolve the issues that we face as human beings from the outside in with a rule oriented approach. You just cannot do it. I know as a parent of my children I saw my sister do this when I was visiting her over Christmas time with her kids.

Her kids are a bit younger than ours. But I can remember what it was like to try and impose rules on your kids. You don't hit each other. That's one of the rules. That's a fair rule as a parent to impose on your children. And so when one of your children hits another child well you've got to deal with it don't you?

And so you have a rule to deal with that as well. Okay you must say sorry. And so you get one the child that hit to say sorry to the child that was hit. And even the child that was hit can tell that they're not really sorry.

But frankly as parents we've done our job haven't we? One child hit another we've got them to say sorry job done. Really? No chance.

[23 : 18] We cannot regulate the issues that we face by going from the outside in. Everyone needs saving. Jesus is that saviour.

But these men they were in the business of limiting and concealing their sin. They added to the law to try and limit and cover over what was going on.

They built up these walls around them of law to try and look respectable. But in their hearts they were the same as everyone else around them.

because of their method though they didn't want a Messiah who would reveal their sin. So they said no to God with us.

Emmanuel. Never since before the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. To paraphrase the man that was healed is saying are you guys crazy?

[24 : 20] Throughout all of this the man just keeps growing in his faith. He just keeps seeing Jesus more clearly and the Pharisees have no answer so they cast him out.

They stuck with their plan. Why? Because this miserable sinner was going too far. In verse 34 they answered him you were born in utter sin.

They put him back in the category that Jesus is rescuing him from. And they just close ranks on him. Their world revolved around a plan that relied on their efforts.

Jesus was threatening to turn their world upside down. He was giving hope even to outcasts to sinners. And they were under the illusion that they were in control.

People really believe that they can influence things that are out of their control. This is actually a scientifically proven fact. in the 1970s.

[25 : 20] This is a long time ago now. The 1970s. A researcher from UCLA called Ellen Langer actually demonstrated this. She demonstrated a principle that she called the illusion of control. Let me give you a simple example of one of her research projects.

She got people to invest in the lottery and study their expectations as they invested in the lottery. And she found that people who buy a lottery ticket where they choose the numbers believe they are more likely to win than those who were assigned random numbers.

If we have any involvement in a process we begin to think much more strongly that we actually have some element of control. We're more likely to win.

Even though it's all random. This belief is so strong that advertisers and sales people have been using this trade in us to manipulate us for decades. The law offers an illusion of control and Jesus offers the painful truth and yet with it he offers us hope.

But we won't come to him. We won't see that hope unless we see the truth. What do you see? In these events the man born blind was back where he started perhaps even worse off.

[26 : 47] He was kicked out of the synagogue. He was branded a sinner. When Jesus hears what happened he sought him out and he filled in the missing pieces for him. Jesus answered the man's burning question about who is behind all of this.

He explains who healed him. He actually does it a little bit cryptically but he says do you believe in the son of man where the son of man was from the vision of Daniel.

It was the revelation of God in human form. Do you believe in the son of man? And he answers and who is he sir that I may believe in him? Not wanting a description of what the son of man is but an identity.

Point him out and I will go to him. Jesus said to him you have seen him and it is he who is speaking to you. The man responds in faith Lord I believe and he worshipped him.

He knew what it was to be a sinner. He was still seen as a sinner by the spiritual leaders of his community. He knew the incredible burden of the law.

[27 : 59] All his life he had lived under the weight of sin. He was born blind but for the first time he could see. Some of you may know a man called Charles Wesley.

Charles Wesley was a good man. He knew the Bible well. He studied it daily. He lived his life by it for years. He was one of the leaders of a Christian movement called the Methodists.

He was admired, almost feared for his zeal. He could actually quote these words and I'm going to quote from a hymn called And Can It Be.

He actually wrote this hymn once he understood it, once he could actually see who he was. He spent his life trying to purge himself of sin and he did such a good job of it.

He was seen as one of the best Christian men around. But it wasn't until he could truly see, until he could truly see Jesus that he wrote these words.

[29 : 10] Has been since the quickening ray I woke the dungeon flamed with light.

My chains fell off. My heart was free. I rose, went forth, and followed thee. Friends, can you see?

Can you see this Jesus? Let me pray. How can it be that we should gain an interest in our Saviour's blood?

Lord, the fact that he died for us who caused his pain, pursued us to the point of death. What amazing love.

Lord, we ask the question, how can it be that you, my God, should die for me? But we thank you so much that this was your rescue plan. We're sinners in need of salvation.

[30 : 23] Thank you, Lord, for rescuing us. And Lord, for those of us here who haven't yet seen Jesus this way, haven't actually recognised the salvation that he offers, Lord, I ask that you would show yourself to them.

Show them not just the historical Jesus, not just the Jesus of justification, the one who died in our place, but the Jesus we all desperately need.

I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.