

# A spirituality that works ... at being Spirit filled

*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: 27 January 2019

Preacher: Simon Dowdy

[ 0 : 00 ] The reading is from John chapter 9 beginning at verse 1 and it can be found on page 1079 of the Church Bibles.

Jesus heals a man born blind. As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?

Jesus answered, it was not that this man sinned or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day.

Night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

Having said these things, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva.

Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud and said to him, go, wash in the pool of Siloam, which means sent. So he went and washed and came back seeing.

[ 1 : 25 ] The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, is this not the man who used to sit and beg? Some said, it is he.

Others said, no, but he is like him. He kept saying, I am the man. So they said to him, then how were your eyes opened?

He answered, the man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed and received my sight.

They said to him, where is he? He said, I do not know. They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind.

Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, he put mud on my eyes and I washed and I see.

[ 2 : 31 ] Some of the Pharisees said, this man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath. But others said, how can a man who is a sinner do such signs?

And there was division among them. So they said again to the blind man, what do you say about him since he has opened your eyes?

He said, he is a prophet. The Jews did not believe that he had been born blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, is this your son who you say was born blind?

How then does he now see? His parents answered, we know that this is our son and that he was born blind. But how he now sees, we do not know.

Nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him, he is of age. He will speak for himself. His parents said these things because they feared the Jews.

[ 3 : 35 ] For the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, he is of age, ask him.

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, give glory to God. We know this man is a sinner. He answered, whether he is a sinner, I do not know.

One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see. They said to him, what did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?

He answered them, I have told you already and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples? And they reviled him saying, you are his disciples.

But we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses. But as for this man, we do not know where he comes from. The man answered, why this is an amazing thing.

[ 4 : 42 ] You do not know where he comes from. And yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. But if anyone is a worshiper 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. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.

They answered him, you were born in utter sin. And would you teach us? And they cast him out. Jesus heard that they had cast him out.

And having found him, he said, do you believe in the son of man? He answered, and who is he, sir, that I may believe in him? Jesus said to him, you have seen him.

And it is he who is speaking to you. He said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him. Jesus said, for judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.

[ 5 : 55 ] Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things and said to him, are we also blind? Jesus said to them, if you were blind, you would have no guilt.

But now that you say, we see, your guilt remains. Thank you very much indeed.

And thank you very much for your partnership here at Grace Church Dulwich. We appreciate it very much at Holy Redeemer Straton down the road. We're a less mature congregation. And it's great to have support from a big bunch like you, a bigger bunch, who are more mature than most of us, I think, in spiritual things.

So it's great. Thank you very much indeed. Thank you very much.

Amen. Well, it's a wonderful reading, isn't it? And we've just seen the account of Jesus healing the man who is born blind.

[ 7 : 19 ] And such a thing has never been seen before or since. And yet it is one of the best attested miracles in the Bible. Even Jesus' enemies, the Pharisees, acknowledge that this is a miracle that has happened when they say in verse 26, not did he open your eyes, but how did he open your eyes?

They're not questioning whether it happened or not. They're just wondering how it happened. This miracle is an evidence and a demonstration of the amazing claim that Jesus has just made back in chapter 8, where he has said at the end of the Feast of Tabernacles, when all the lights in the temple are being put out, he stands up and says, I am the light of the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. Now, in chapter 9, we're hearing the dialogue between the man whose eyes have been opened and Jesus, and between the man whose eyes have been opened and the Pharisees.

And we can't go back over it. So this morning, we're just going to look at one verse, verse 39, which talks about Jesus coming for judgment into this world.

Now, at Grace Church, we don't miss out parts of the Bible that are unpopular. It's not a popular topic in today's world to talk about God as judge or Jesus as judge.

[ 8 : 46 ] But we believe that all scripture is God-breathed and that we need all of it. So we're not going to dodge the difficult bits. We're going to look at them. And what we're going to see from this verse are the three things on the notice sheet.

A process of judgment, which is going on all the time. The blind beggar, who shows us salvation at work. And the Pharisee, the Pharisees, who show us judgment at work.

So firstly, there is a process of judgment going on all the time. Verse 39, Jesus says there, For judgment I came into the world.

So to start with the big picture, because it's always a good thing to start with the big picture and then work down to the detail. And then come back out to the big picture again. So the big picture is that here in verse 39, Jesus is not talking about the final day of judgment, which is in the future for us still.

There is that day to come. Romans chapter 2, verse 5, speaks about that future day when God's righteous judgment will, in that future, be revealed and determine our eternal destiny.

[ 10 : 03 ] Acts chapter 17, verse 31, tells us that the resurrection of Jesus declares that he will be the judge on that future day. Which, please note, is a date that God already has in his diary.

It's that certain. So Acts chapter 17, verse 31 says, God has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed.

And he has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead. Now, I don't know what you make of that. I hope you think it's good news because of the words, with justice.

You've got some lawyers here, and it's a very good thing that we have a country where there is justice. We all know that justice, however, is not always served in our world.

But we want it to be, don't we? Particularly when we or our loved ones have been treated unjustly. So we can see that it's a good thing that justice will be done.

[11:08] And God's judgment will be fair. No one will complain that they've been treated unfairly on that day. It's good news. But of course, it means that we are all facing a problem.

Because all of us break God's law, and we deserve God's judgment on that future coming day. That's, of course, why Jesus came.

He saves all who come to him from that judgment. Now, having seen a bit of the big picture of God's future day of judgment, how does verse 39 fit into that?

Because it's present tense, isn't it? Jesus says, verse 39, I have come for judgment into this world. Now, for the sake of honesty, there's an apparent contradiction here in the things that Jesus says. Because if we go back to chapter 3 of John's Gospel and verse 17, Jesus says, For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world. So it looks as if he didn't come to judge the world.

[12:19] But here, it looks as if he did. So what is going on? Well, it's an apparent contradiction. Because Jesus did not come primarily to declare final judgment when he came the first time.

He came to save sinners. But here's the thing. His coming results both in salvation and judgment. He is who he claims to be, the light of the world.

The light that shows and shines in the darkness of our world, that penetrates the shadows of this world. And now that he is here, those who welcome him are transferred out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light, God's kingdom.

Because those who refuse his light choose to turn away from the light into deeper darkness. So the way they received or rejected Jesus then, and the way we receive or reject Jesus now when we meet him in the scriptures, brings the future verdict of God's judgment.

Into the present. A process of judgment is going on all the time as we meet Jesus. For us today, wherever Jesus Christ is preached and made known, both judgment and salvation are being anticipated by our response to what we hear about him.

[13:56] That means that what we are doing now, hearing God's word about his son, is a dangerous thing.

Now if you had a list of dangerous things that you might put down on a bit of paper, what would be on it? It could be things like base jumping, or perhaps giving childbirth, giving birth to a child.

Or it could be going home late at night, and you're wondering about who's around. But probably going to church wouldn't be on your list of dangerous things to do.

But actually, it is. Because every time we hear about Jesus, and every time God's word is opened, that future day of judgment is being anticipated by our response to it, and to him who we see in his word and who is presented to us.

So it's a big question, isn't it? How are we responding to Jesus Christ today as we hear about him? And we have in chapter 9 examples of what it looks like to come to Jesus, to come into the light in the man who is born blind, and an example of what it is like, what it looks like, to turn away from the light in the Pharisees.

[15:21] And we're going to think briefly about those two groups of people. So let's think first about the blind beggar, who is a picture of salvation at work.

Now, salvation is a past, the present, and a future thing. And it's to do with being set free from sin. So in the past, salvation means being set free from the penalty of sin.

In the present, we're set free from the power of sin. And in the future, we will be set free from the presence of sin. It's a wonderful thing, salvation. And it comes to everybody who believes in Jesus Christ.

And the purpose of John writing this book about Jesus, he tells us at the end of the book, chapter 20 and verse 31, these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name.

You may have salvation, freedom from sin, and a life one day free from the presence of sin. So the big question is, what does it mean to believe in Jesus Christ?

[16:32] Clearly, it's very important. But what does it look like to believe in him? Well, John's answer is given us here in chapter 9.

John's answer is, look at the blind beggar, because there you see what it is to believe in Jesus. In chapter 9, we have the profile of a man who comes to Jesus, who comes into the light, the blind beggar.

We see how he comes to believe in Jesus. We see what it is to believe in Jesus. And we see what it's like to live as a believer in Jesus. We see how he comes to believe in Jesus.

And it is by acting on what he learns about him. He hears things about him, and he puts it into action. Some people I've talked to, and you may have had a similar experience, like to talk about Jesus as a significant person.

But they have no intention of letting him change their lives. It's just an academic interest, isn't it? Not so with the blind beggar.

[ 17 : 49 ] Jesus asks him in verse 35, do you believe in the Son of Man? And he answers, who is he? He wants to know. Not, it seems, out of idle curiosity, or as a matter of academic interest, but so that he could know him and trust him and follow him himself.

His is a belief that acts on the evidence that he discovers. And he gradually finds out more about this Jesus.

He begins in verse 11 by saying, this man, Jesus. He goes on in verse 17 to say he is a prophet. In verse 33, he says he is from God.

And in verse 38, he says he is God. In fact, as we look at verse 38, we see not only how somebody comes to believe in Jesus by acting on the information that we have about him, we see also what it is to believe in Jesus.

And verse 38 is a brilliant summary. Just look at it. He said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him. To believe in Jesus is to acknowledge him as boss, to move out of the driving seat, which is the place we naturally take, and to invite him into his rightful place, in control, in charge of our lives.

[ 19 : 22 ] And to worship him, to live the whole of our lives for him, with him, and serving him. That is what it is.

To be a believer. How you come to faith, you act on the evidence. You do something with the information that you've got about this person.

What does it mean? It means to recognize him as boss, and to repent, to recognize that I am not in charge, he is. And it means to live life for him and with him.

And what is life like for somebody who has this belief in Jesus? Well, let's look at the life of this blind man. And we'll see that as the chapter unfolds, he and those who follow Jesus as Lord can expect to have a share in some of the opposition that Jesus himself faced.

So this man has quite a bumpy ride. In verse 24, the religious authorities say to him, they call him a second time, and say, give glory to God.

[ 20 : 41 ] We know that this man is a sinner. We're the religious authorities, and they're putting this man under pressure to believe something that is untrue about Jesus.

And the same happens all the way through. There are people in the church today, often with dog collars, who will say, you can't possibly believe that Jesus died as a substitutionary sacrifice.

That's barbaric. But of course, that is exactly what God says his son came to be. And then in verse 28, they insult the man, if we look at that verse.

They revile him. And that is what will happen, possibly from other people who identify as Christians. You're not one of those Bible-believing Christians, are you?

You're so unloving. You're so judgmental. You're so unfair in the way you treat people. And finally, actually, before we get to that, he is separated from his own parents in verses 20 to 23.

[ 22 : 02 ] His own parents want to stay with the majority, the safe majority, and they distance themselves from him, from their son. They say, his parents answer, we do know that he is our son and that he was born blind, but how he became to see, who opened his eyes, we don't know.

Ask him. He's of age. He'll speak for himself. And we're told why they distance themselves from him. In verse 22, his parents said these things because they feared the Jews because the Jews had already agreed that anyone who should confess Jesus to be the Christ was to be put out of their synagogue.

And like so many, the parents wanted to stay with the majority. And finally, the man himself is put out of the synagogue in verse 34.

The Pharisees say, you were born in utter sin. Would you teach us? And they cast him out. And so it is that many people are expelled from their families, particularly if they come perhaps from a Muslim background or a Hindu background and they come to follow Jesus.

Many people are actually thrown out of their families quite directly and literally. And the message is, I think, as we look at the life of the man born blind who is a true follower of Jesus, we can expect

quite a bumpy ride as followers of Jesus.

[ 23 : 30 ] We shouldn't expect it to be comfortable. We shouldn't expect to be popular. We shouldn't be expecting to be part of the mainstream group of society. He wasn't.

And this is what Jesus tells us elsewhere to expect. Jesus is the light of the world and he tells us in the Sermon on the Mount, you are the light of the world. As we spend time with him and genuinely see him and genuinely are believers like this man, we reflect his light into his world of darkness and we can expect to be treated in some small measure as he was treated.

By being different, we become a target. We become unpopular. But Jesus says, blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you, falsely, for so they did to the prophets who were before you.

So that's a little bit about what we can expect life to be like as a believer in the Lord Jesus. And then finally, we see the Pharisees who show us judgment at work.

As well as giving us the profile of the man who comes to believe in Jesus, who turns to the light, we have the profile of those who will not believe in him and therefore are turning into the darkness, the Pharisees and the blind man's parents.

[ 24 : 57 ] The Pharisees suspect that Jesus is talking about them when he says that he has come so that the blind may see and those who see may become blind in verse 39 because they say in verse 40, what, are we blind too?

And the message is that Jesus say, yes, at the present time you are. But Jesus has not come into the world to condemn the world. He's come to save it, including religious people like the Pharisees. So he invites them to think it out for themselves in verse 41. If you were blind, you would have no guilt. But now that you say we see, your guilt remains.

If you had no opportunity to see that I am the light of the world, you wouldn't be guilty. Perhaps you've grown up in a home where there was no knowledge of Jesus or in a local church where there is no teaching about him from the Bible.

Well, you wouldn't be guilty for not believing in him if that were the case. But that is not the case here. The light of the world is standing in front of these men.

[ 26 : 10 ] He had recently stood up in the temple of Jerusalem at the public feast of tabernacles and said, he is the light of the world. They had just seen him open the eyes of the man who had been born blind.

And they knew, as everybody else knew, that this is not something that man can do. This is a work of God. They knew their scriptures. They were the experts in the scriptures.

They knew that opening the eyes of the blind was the work of God's appointed king, the Messiah. And yet here they are turning their back on him and accusing him of being a sinner and accusing anybody who followed him of being the same.

Rather than following the evidence, rather than acting on the evidence, rather than seeing the evidence, they suppress it. They discredit the man's testimony by declaring him to be a sinner and expelling him from the synagogue.

They turned to the darkness, away from the light. They were not bad by the standards of the time. They were very good people, generous, moral, reverent in their attitude to God and to the scriptures outwardly.

[ 27 : 27 ] But they were proud of their own goodness and of their own view of the world. So they thought that they had nothing to learn from God's revelation. They thought they needed nothing but the eyes of this world and the wisdom of this world.

So they were blind to God's Son who is not of this world, who'd come into it as its creator. So they turned away from him into the darkness of their own view of God and this world.

They turned away from him into the darkness of their own view of God and of this world. They had access to God's revelation.

His Son was standing there in front of them but they were determined to deny the evidence and therefore Jesus' verdict on them in verse 41 is a chilling one.

Your guilt remains. For us we have the teaching of Jesus and free access to it in the scriptures and every opportunity to see who he is and to learn about him and not to do so is to be guilty.

[ 28 : 51 ] Not to ask God to open our blind eyes is to remain willfully in the darkness. So the question for us today is which are we like?

The Pharisees or the blind beggar? Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father many I myself freely and frequently can see myself being reflected in the mirror of the Pharisees in the accounts of Jesus' life and so quickly decline into that kind of rather self-satisfied faith and religion and I ask that you'll please keep me from that and please give me the courage please keep opening my eyes to see your son as he really is and to to rejoice if the honour of bearing some knocks and bruises for him comes along to rejoice at that as evidence that he is truly at work and please help me to be like this blind beggar who recognised him as Lord and who worshipped him  
Amen Amen