

Jesus, Giver of Sight

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[0 : 00] I encourage you to turn again to the reading that we had from John's Gospel, chapter 9 on page 871. And this is the third of four sermons from John's Gospel on the theme of light and life to all he brings.

And let's pray. Lord Jesus Christ, shine your light, the light of the world into our hearts and minds, we pray, that we may see and believe and worship you.

Amen. Seeing is believing. So some say. Certainly was Thomas' dictum, if you remember, doubting Thomas after the resurrection. Unless I see, I will not believe that Jesus is risen from the dead. And mercifully to Thomas, a week later he saw and believed in the risen Lord Jesus Christ. In today's reading we find a man who's been blind from birth, unable to see, unable ever to see in his whole life.

Presumably he was begging. We're told later that he was a beggar. And that would be typical of that sort of society without social security benefits of people who were injured, handicapped, blind, lame, etc.

[1 : 13] who were needing to beg to get some income to survive, basically, in such a place. It's rare, I guess, for us to experience a total lack of sight.

There are some here and people whom we know who are losing sight, have gone somewhat blind, but often still see light and darkness, some shadows, but maybe people but not recognise them, unable perhaps to read, but still see something.

Presumably for this man he saw nothing. It's hard to quite experience that. I think the closest I've ever come was when, for some inexplicable reason I shall never understand, I went caving.

And miles underground, stuck in all these rocks, unable to see any hint of light. And we switched our torches off. And it was absolutely pitch black.

You couldn't see anything at all. For us, when we turn lights out, your eyes get accustomed to it. You see something. For this man, presumably, he saw absolutely nothing.

[2 : 20] And as they pass him by, the disciples raise the issue of suffering. Why is this man blind from birth? Who sinned? Was it him? Maybe even sinning in the womb, which was part of a Jewish tradition of some folk?

Or is it because his parents sinned? After all, he's blind from birth, so maybe it's the parents' fault. And he's suffering because of their parents' sin. And there are verses in the Old Testament that Jewish thinkers might appeal to for either of those views.

That you suffer because your sin yourself. Or maybe misreading one of the commandments in the Ten Commandments. That God punishes the children for the parents' sins.

Not quite the right way it should be read, I think. Jesus changes their question, in effect. He doesn't deal with the cause so much as the purpose.

Why is this man blind from birth? Not because he sinned or his parents sinned necessarily. But rather, as Jesus says in verse 3, He was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him.

[3 : 31] And actually that's the biggest issue for suffering actually in the Bible. Is its purpose for the glory of God. Not necessarily issues of cause, although they're not unimportant either.

The discussion sets the scene for understanding the healing that follows. It could be that this man heard this discussion. Maybe not.

Maybe they're out of earshot as they speak about him. And why he's blind from birth. Jesus having said that God's works might be revealed in him.

Then says, we must work the works of him who sent me. That is God. While it is day. Night is coming when no one can work.

And Jesus is not referring to the sort of 24 hour day of daylight for 12 hours. And then night time for 12. Or something like that. Because he then goes on in verse 5 to say, As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

[4 : 34] What Jesus is saying is we have to do the works of him who sent me. The works of God. That will in effect bring glory to God. While I'm here on earth. I'm the light of the world.

We saw that last week in chapter 8. When he makes that pronouncement. And I'm only here for a short time. Before I'm arrested and crucified and buried.

And then rise up to heaven. Now is the time for the works of God. That we shall do. And that will bring glory to almighty God.

And time is short. Is what he's saying. And then without any preliminary discussion. Without any telling us that the man was even involved in any discussion.

Jesus goes up to him. He spits in the ground. He makes some mud. And he wipes it on the man's eyes. And says, go and wash in the pool of Salon. Now you imagine that you were this beggar.

[5 : 33] It could be that there was discussion that's not reported. But this whole incident is reported at quite length. It's almost as though Jesus and the disciples out of Eeshut over here are talking.

And then Jesus walks up to this man born blind. And the first thing this man born blind knows is that he feels the mud being wiped onto his eyes. And this man whom he doesn't know say, go and wash in the pool of Salon.

Now it's clear that he knows the man's name. That comes later. But you might feel a bit cheesed off if you were this blind man. We're not sure where in Jerusalem he was begging.

But it's most likely most beggars would be around the outside of the temple. Because that's where people would come to worship. And you'd appeal to people's generosity as they went to worship.

To walk down to the pool of Salon is perhaps a 10, maybe 15 minute walk for us. For a blind person. Longer, presumably. To find your way.

[6 : 29] Maybe there's somebody to help him. Maybe not. And then a steep walk back up as well. It's quite a way down. To the pool of Salon. The pool of Salon is the very end of the old city of David.

But it's only actually just been found in the last couple of years by archaeologists. And those of us who were there in Jerusalem about a year ago on the trip that I was leading. We were able to see this newly discovered part of the pool of Salon.

Discovered accidentally we could say. Because the people who owned the land wanted to build a new house or something. And in preparing to build they discovered underneath the pool of Salon. Well anyway, this man. Maybe put out because he's going to lose begging time. That was his income. Does what Jesus says.

That's quite extraordinary in a way. It seems that he doesn't. He knows Jesus' name but not necessarily much about him. And yet he actually believes and trusts the command of Jesus to go and wash in the pool of Salon.

[7 : 30] And he does it. And when he comes back it seems that Jesus has moved on. But when he comes back he has his sight. The pool of Salon we're told means sent.

And it's probably no coincidence that Jesus has already said that he has to do the works of him who sent me. The works of God.

The works that bring glory to God. Well this man comes back seeing. He doesn't see Jesus. Jesus has moved on it seems. And his healing creates a puzzle for his neighbours and others.

Is this the man who was born blind? Maybe it's somebody else. Maybe it's a con job. Maybe somebody's pretending to beg and they're not really blind. That could be part of their questioning in verses 8 to 12. Who is this man?

How did this happen? Where is the one who did the healing? They're the sorts of questions that are raised at the end of that paragraph. Verses 8 to 12. And so they brought him to the Pharisees.

[8 : 35] The man who now sees but was formerly blind. The Pharisees remember are the Jewish religious intelligentsia. The Jewish religious police in a way.

The Jewish elite who knew their Bibles very well. Who were teachers and meticulous about keeping the law. Don't you sort of imagine a church leader in this context.

Because in this society the religious leadership controlled in effect the Jewish society as a whole.

Even though it was under Roman rule in Judea. So where we have this sort of separation of church and the world and society that was not as it was.

So the Jewish Pharisee leaders are very powerful figures in the society. We'll see glimpses of that later on this morning. They come to the Pharisees.

They come to the Pharisees. Clearly it's a bit of an issue because it's on a Sabbath day. And as we saw two weeks ago in chapter 5 when Jesus healed a lame man then. This creates a particular dilemma of breaking the Sabbath law.

[9 : 38] And even needing anything like mud would be breaking a Sabbath law. So when Jesus mixes saliva and dirt to create mud. Breaking the Sabbath law.

Wiping it on his face to heal him. Probably breaking the Sabbath law as well. What follows then when he comes and is brought to the Pharisees is a bit like a trial. A bit of an interrogation. Firstly of the man. Then his parents. And then back to the man again. From the start the Pharisees it seems are divided. We read in verse 16 for example.

Some of them said this man is not from God for he does not observe the Sabbath. That is this man Jesus who did the healing. And others of the Pharisees said well how can a man who is a sinner perform such signs.

So they're split. How can a man who does this really be a sinner. And yet how can a man break the Sabbath he must be a sinner.

[10 : 40] And that's their sort of moral dilemma. As they're trying to investigate what's been going on here. They think perhaps that this man is in fact an imposter.

That he was never blind. And so they get the parents to come as added witnesses. In Jewish law you would need another witness. And that seems to be what's going on in verse 18.

The Jews did not believe that he'd been blind. And had received his sight. Until they called the parents of the man who'd received his sight. And asked them is this your son. And they say yes we know that it's our son.

He was blind. We don't know how it was is now that he sees. Nor who opened his eyes. Ask him. He's old enough. And so they come back to the man to interrogate him.

Throughout this whole episode. And especially the interrogation. There's elements of comedy. It's a bit of dark humour in a way. As I read it through it. It reminds me of sort of.

[11 : 41] You know a bumbling sort of interrogation. I think of Inspector Clouseau. You know Peter Sellers in the Pink Panther films. Where he really has no idea really what's going on.

Or a bit like Maxwell Smart in Get Smart. Completely hopeless by way of interrogation. And yet somehow stumbles upon the truth. Well here the Pharisees. As they interrogate the man.

Then his parents. And then the man again. Are clearly exposing their ignorance. And absolute confusion really. Of what's going on. And yet it's a confusion that is dampened.

By their pride and arrogance. Even though they're ignorant. We see it in the way the use. Or the use of the word. To know something. Or not know something comes.

Back in verse 12. The man who had been blind. Does not know where Jesus now is. That's fair enough. But then in particular.

[12 : 37] In the interrogation. In verse 20. The parents say. We know. That this is our son. And that he was born blind. But then in verse 21.

They do not know. How it is that he now sees. So that's the first sort of. This theme coming to the fore. What they know. What they don't know. Then the Pharisees.

Say to the man. In verse 24. Give glory to God. We know. That this man is a sinner. Well they were divided. Amongst themselves.

On that very issue. A few verses before that. So here they are. Now coming together. Saying. We know. This man is a sinner. Do they really.

Their. Their. Their dogmatism. Of knowledge. Is actually exposing. Their ignorance. For we know. That they're wrong. They don't really know.

[13 : 35] That Jesus is a sinner. Because. He isn't. And then they go on. To say. In verse. 25. Oh the man. Rather. Goes on to say.

I do not know. Whether he is a sinner. But one thing. I do know. He says. At the end. Of verse 25. I was blind.

Now. I see. So the Pharisees. Are pushing forward. What they claim. To know. This man. Is a sinner. The man says. Well I don't know. If he's a sinner.

Or not. But one thing. I do know. I was blind. And now. I see. In verse 29. The Pharisees. Say. We know. That God.

Has spoken. To Moses. But as for this man. We do not know. Where he comes from. Now that's the climax. Of comedy. In a way.

[14:29] They're basically. Acknowledging. Or confessing. We are ignorant. About this man. We know. He's a sinner. We don't know. Where he comes from. What sort of knowledge. Is that? What sort of interrogation.

Is this? And the man. Knows this. He says. In verses 30. And 31. Here's an astonishing thing. You do not know.

Where he comes from. And yet he opened my eyes. We know. That God does not listen to sinners. But he does listen to one who worships him.

And obeys his will. The man in effect. Is saying to the Pharisees. People who were reputed. To have vast knowledge. Of religious. Of religious. And scriptural matters.

Your knowledge is flawed. You are actually ignorant. You say. You don't know. Where he comes from. But you ought to know that. Because of what he's done. You claim that you know.

[15:24] That he's a sinner. But such knowledge. Is actually wrong. You're ignorant. Not knowledgeable. The man in fact. Exposes their.

Blind prejudice. And their ignorance. About Jesus Christ. The religious elite. Are in effect. Being exposed.

By a beggar. Who couldn't see. Anything. Until this day. Their ignorance. Has blinded them.

To the truth. Now keep in mind. Here. How. Fearful. The people were. About the Pharisees. How strong.

And powerful. They were. The sort of elements. Of comparison. With. Some of those. Dictatorial states. With their. Intelligentsia. And their police. And spies. Around the place.

[16:20] People were afraid. Of the Pharisees. In verse 24. The parents. Of the man. They're afraid. Of the Pharisees. Sorry. In verse 22. His parents said. Ask him.

Don't ask us. Because. They were afraid. Of the Jews. For the Jews. Had already agreed. That anyone. Who confessed. Jesus. To be the Messiah. Would be put out. Of the synagogue. They're afraid.

They've already. Made their decision. About Jesus. He's not the Messiah. And anyone. Who says he is. You're out. Of the synagogue. Now think. Of what being. Cast out of the synagogue. Meant. In our society. If you're kicked out. Of a church. Which is pretty rare. So be it. I mean. Go to another church. But if you were kicked out. Of the synagogue. Here. It's like having your credit cards. Driving license. And passport. Taken from you. In one swoop. You would lose. Your social standing. Your economic standing. All together.

[17:17] People would shun you. Ostracize you. If you were a beggar. Cast out. No one would give you money. In Jerusalem. Which wasn't all that very big.

People would be. Told. Don't deal with their business. If you run a bakery. People would go to the baker. Down the street. You fixed. People's goods or items. They would find somebody else.

You'd go broke. You'd be left out. To be kicked out of the synagogue. Was a major matter. And that's what the parents. And others. Were fearful of. But this healed man.

A simple beggar. Doesn't bow. To the intimidation. Or the fear. That the Pharisees. Engender in their society. He actually. Is an extraordinary man.

This formerly. Blind beggar. He says. He is told. In verse 24. When they call him back. For a second time.

[18:17] Give glory to God. We know that this man. Is a sinner. The thrust of that statement. Give glory to God. Is not a sort of naive. Let's. Let's thank God.

For your healing. Sort of stuff. It's actually a threat. They're saying. If you acknowledge. That Jesus is the one. Who's done this. You're in trouble. Give glory to God.

Not to Jesus. Is behind this sort of threat. A similar sort of thing. Happens in Joshua. Chapter 7. With Achan. Who steals some things. From war. And is eventually exposed. And killed. For that theft.

And that's the sort of. Idea here. It's a bit like a threat. You've done wrong. Now acknowledge it. This is your last chance. Speak the truth. Give glory to God. And ignore this.

Jesus is behind this threat. It's a bullying tactic. Remember of course. What Jesus said. In verse 3. That he's come to do. The works of God.

[19:12] In effect. To bring glory to God. And what the Pharisees think. Is that giving glory to God. Puts Jesus on the sideline. But what's the truth of the matter. As we know. As Jesus said.

In verses 3 and 4. As this man recognises. To give glory to God. Is actually to acknowledge. That Jesus is the one. Who has healed him. He's a bold man.

This man. He doesn't capitulate. Before their pressure. There's certain irony. In the way they say. Give glory to God. As they try to.

Put Jesus out. It's actually Jesus. Who comes. To give glory to God. In his miracles and works. And in fact. John's gospel. Above all the gospels. Acknowledges the link.

Between the miracles of Jesus. And the glory of God. Being revealed in Christ. Christ. But even more than that. This bold man. Stands up. To this pharisaic bullying. And he gives a simple.

[20:06] But eloquent testimony. He's not educated. Perhaps. Probably. Not educated. He doesn't give a great big. Theological treatise. He simply says. One thing I know. I was blind.

But now I see. That's where John Newton. Gets the words. From. For the hymn. Amazing Grace. Of course. I was blind. But now I see.

How does it happen? Well. I can't really explain it. But I know it's true. They ask him again. How does it happen? In verse 26. And with.

Rather. Impudent cheek. As well as boldness. The man replies. In verse 27. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples? Well.

I think he's treading on dangerous ground. When he says that. But good on him. Good on him. Do you want to hear the testimony again? Maybe you'll be converted by hearing about what Jesus has done again.

[21:05] And when he says. Do you also want to be his disciples? There's just a hint that he's calling himself one. When he says that. And they pour scorn on him.

They revile him. In verse 28. You are his disciple. But we are disciples of Moses. Well fair enough. Moses was the great prophet and speaker of God's law in the Old Testament.

The trouble was. They actually weren't disciples of Moses. Because they weren't one. Disciples of the one who Moses pointed towards. The prophet who would come after him. Greater than him. The man not intimidated.

Then rebukes them. In verse 30. Here is an astonishing thing. You do not know where he comes from. And yet he opened my eyes.

We know that God does not listen to sinners. But he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Clearly he's saying. This man Jesus. Who opened my eyes. Comes from God. The only consequence.

[22:13] Or conclusion I can draw from this. In fact. Never since the world began. Has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person. Born blind.

If this man were not from God. He could do nothing. Here is a fledgling believer. A brand new believer. Interrogated by the religious elite.

And he simply speaks of what Jesus has done. He's guileless. Fearless and bold. And as a consequence. They drive him out of the synagogue. In verse 34.

With all its social and economic consequences. He would have been better off blind and begging. Economically. Because he's not the last Christian.

Brand new Christian. To be subjected to such pressure. Such threat. Such bullying. Countless Christians.

[23:12] For 2,000 years. Have faced that. Often brand new Christians. Newly converted. Maybe newly baptised. One of our Chinese students.

Who comes to our afternoon bilingual service. Parents have now immigrated to Australia. Don't want him to come to church. There's another who's. One of our Chinese young adults.

But coming at night service. Who's yet to be baptised. Because his parents don't want him to be baptised. But he's come to faith this year. But of course. How much more seriously.

In other parts of the world. Where people are killed. Maimed. Houses burnt. Kicked out of towns and villages. Shunned by parents.

By spouses. Because they've become Christian. Sometimes we think we. We live in such a civilised society.

[24:06] And it's okay. And we. We lose the cutting edge. Of how serious it is. To confess Jesus. And how hostile the world is. To Jesus Christ.

There are more Christians put to death. For their faith. In the last few years. Than in the years before that. And in the years before that. That is the persecution of Christianity. Is increasing. Not going away. In our own society. As well as. In other countries of our world. And no doubt. John is giving us. This full account.

To embolden. And encourage us. To bear witness to Jesus. Regardless of the consequences. From those who oppose him.

It's worth recognising. This man's claim as well. That never since. The beginning of the world. Has anyone heard. Of a man who's. Opened the eyes. Of someone born blind. There are a number of miracles.

[25 : 04] In the Old Testament. There are people who are healed. Even brought back from the dead. None of them. Is born blind. And able to see. But the Old Testament. The Old Testament keeps on expecting. That that will happen.

For example. In Isaiah the prophet. We heard in chapter 29. In the first reading. An expectation of that. In chapter 35. The same thing. Then shall the lame leap like a deer.

And the eyes of the blind. And the eyes of the blind shall be opened. And the ears of the deaf unstopped. And significantly later in Isaiah 42. Passage I read out last week. When Jesus says. I am the light of the world.

Picking up the expectation of the servant who would come. What is the fullness of that expectation in Isaiah 42. I have given you as a covenant to the people.

A light to the nations. To open the eyes that are blind. And here he is. The servant of the Lord. Long awaited. Who has come and is opening.

[26 : 01] The eyes of the blind. We don't know where he comes from. The Pharisees said. They do not know their own scriptures.

He comes from God. Promised by God. Opening the eyes of the blind. If this man were not from God.

He could do nothing. The blind man said. How right he was. Well finally he meets and sees his healer. Jesus having heard he was driven out of the synagogue.

In verse 35 meets with him. And the man responds by worshipping him. Do you believe in the son of man? Who is he sir? He said. Tell me so that I may believe in him.

And Jesus said to him. You have seen him. And the one speaking with you is he. Lord. I believe. And he worshipped him.

[27 : 01] Lay down prostrate on the ground. In front of him. See how this man's faith has grown. Earlier on he said. A man called Jesus healed me. When he was interrogated by the Pharisees.

What do you say about him? He said he is a prophet. Probably alluding to the expectation of the prophet like Moses to come. Later on he said.

As we saw in verse 33. He comes from God. And then finally climactically. He worships him. As Lord.

Jesus then says. I came into this world for judgment. So that those who do not see. May see. And those who do see.

May become blind. Light guides us. But light can blind us. And Jesus is the pivotal light.

[28 : 01] Around which humanity divides. Those who are led by it. Seeing. And those who are blinded by it.

It's clear this is not simply a story of a man. Blind. Now seeing. At the same time. It is the story of those who claim they can see.

But are in fact blind. We know. We know. We know. They keep saying. But they don't. They think they see. But they're blind.

Some of the Pharisees actually overhear these words. It could be. Of course they're out to get Jesus. So they're trying to eavesdrop on all his conversations. To catch him out. And in a very pathetic way.

They say to him. Surely we're not blind. Are we? They understand what Jesus is getting at. And Jesus replied. At the end of the chapter.

[29 : 02] If you were blind. If you were blind. You would not have sin. But now that you say. We see. Your sin remains.

As we've seen last week. And the week before. We cannot separate the moral teaching of Jesus. From who he is. People sometimes say.

I like Jesus' moral teaching. But I reject the claims of him to be divine. They fit together. You cannot drive a wedge between them. The authority of Jesus as the moral teacher.

Is because he is the light of the world. Sent by the father in heaven. And going back to heaven.

Jesus claims of divinity. A part and parcel. Of his moral teaching.

The light of the world. Is to guide morally. And what Jesus is saying here. Is that sin blinds us to the truth. As Paul says in Romans 1. Their minds are darkened.

[29 : 59] Same idea. That as we pursue sin. With pride and arrogance and ignorance. We are blinded more and more. To the truth of the light.

Of the glory of the gospel of Jesus. The Pharisees had accused the man. Of being born in sin. In verse 34.

When they kicked him out of the synagogue. But he was born blind. And he now sees. And believes. His sins are forgiven.

As he worships Jesus. The question at the beginning of the chapter. Is really the one that. Is driving what's going on here. Who sinned.

But the options are not this man. Or his parents. That he's born blind. The answer is. The Pharisees. The Jewish leaders. The ones who think they know.

[30 : 53] With pride and ignorance. But do not. The Bible. The Bible. The Bible. This story is reminding us. That for all the hardship. And inconvenience.

Of physical blindness. Which many here experience. Spiritual blindness. Is far more catastrophic. Far more.

Eternal. In its consequence. Do you see. Do you see. And worship Jesus.

The light of the world. Believing. Is seeing. Blessed are those.

Who do not see. And yet believe. John will write later. In this gospel. Light and life. To all he brings.

[31 : 49] Have you seen. And received. The light of life. For believers. There is one thing we know. I was blind.

But now I see. Thanks be. To Jesus.