

SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS

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[0 : 00] I want us to look this morning at the passage which we read together earlier, Matthew's Gospel, chapter 9, verses 27-34.

! The problem is that not everyone believed in the good news and not everyone recognised that Jesus is the Son of God.

And the passage before us helps us to see the contrast between those who believed in Jesus as the Son of God and those who rejected him and would not believe.

The passage contains an account of two miraculous healings. First, the healing of two blind men.

And second, the healing of a mute, demon-possessed man. In the first case, we have an enthusiastic recognition that Jesus has come from God and that we should believe in him.

[1 : 38] In the second case, we have the Pharisees saying that Jesus is not the Son of God. Indeed, he is an agent of the devil.

You see the contrast here. I want to consider each of the healing stories and then think about spiritual blindness.

So, first of all then, the healing of the blind men. We find the story in verses 27-30 of our passage.

As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, Have mercy on us, Son of God.

When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him and he asked them, Do you believe that I am able to do this? Yes, Lord, they replied.

[2 : 45] Then he touched their eyes and said, According to your faith, will it be done to you? And their sight was restored.

Now, this was not the only time in the Gospels where we find Jesus opening the eyes of the blind.

Indeed, there are many accounts of such healings. For example, in Mark 10, 46-52, we have the story of Bartimaeus.

Jesus and his disciples had arrived in Jericho and crowds of people came out to meet him, including a blind man called Bartimaeus.

And when he heard that Jesus was near, he began to shout out, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me. And this proved to be a bit of an embarrassment to those who were around him.

[3 : 56] And they rebuked him and told him to be quiet. But he paid no attention to them. Let's read what happened next.

Jesus stopped and said, Call him. So they called to the blind man, Cheer up on your feet. He's calling you.

Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. What do you want me to do for you, Jesus? Asked him.

The blind man said, Rabbi, I want to see. Go, said Jesus. Your faith has healed you. Immediately, he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

Now these stories of the healing of the blind should not surprise us. Because right at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus declared that one of the things he was called to do was that the blind would receive their sight.

[5 : 17] I wonder if you remember that visit to Nazareth at the beginning of his ministry. He went to Nazareth, it says, in Luke 4, where he had been brought up.

And on the Sabbath day, he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read.

The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written, The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom from the captive and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. And all the eyes in the synagogue were focused on him.

[6 : 30] And he began by saying to them, Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. Written 800 years before, but it was fulfilled in the life and ministry of Jesus.

Now, if we stop to ask, why did Jesus heal? Then, the answer is that the healings were signs that pointed to the fact that Jesus was the Messiah.

The healings were not an end in themselves. They were signposts pointing to the fact that Jesus was the Messiah.

And we learn this from Jesus himself. In Matthew chapter 11, we read this, When John the Baptist heard in prison what Jesus was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him, Are you the one who was to come?

Or should we expect someone else? Jesus replied, Go back and report to John what you hear and see.

[7 : 54] The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.

Opening the eyes of the blind is part of the evidence that was given to John the Baptist to demonstrate that Jesus is the promised Messiah.

But what about the blind men themselves? What can we say about them? Well, they had faith. Because of their faith, they were healed.

Jesus asked them if they believed that he could do it, and when they said yes, Jesus said, according to your faith will it be done to you and they were healed.

But the second thing to say about these blind men is not so good. You see, when they were healed, as I was saying earlier, they disobeyed the clear instruction of Jesus.

[9 : 09] Jesus warned them, see that no one knows about this, but they went out and spread the news about him all over that region.

Now we can understand this. If you were blind and suddenly you were miraculously healed, it would be very difficult not to go and tell everyone the good news.

Jesus had told them not to do this as on several other occasions in Scripture and they disobeyed and it caused all kinds of difficulties for Jesus in his ministry.

The lesson is simple. Whatever God tells us to do is right and for the best, whatever we may think ourselves.

This is an important truth and it affects also our attitude to the Bible. I wonder if you've ever heard someone, or said it yourself, I wonder if you've ever heard someone say, I know the Bible says that, but, I know the Bible says that, but, and the but is when they're about to go on to say, but I'm going to do something else.

[10 : 46] We should never, ever find ourselves in the position where we say, the Bible does say that, but, there can be no but, if the Bible says it, then we must believe it, and we must obey it, because the Bible is the word of God.

But, why did Jesus give that instruction? Well, the answer, I think, is in Mark's Gospel, chapter 1.

This was a day when Jesus healed many people. But, then we read this in verses 32 to 34.

That evening after sunset, the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases.

Now, that was all very exciting for the crowds, and you can imagine the disciples were excited about that too. Here they were with a front row seat in this remarkable event of the healing of so many people.

[12 : 10] But, Jesus, we find, went away to pray very early in the morning, while it was still dark.

Jesus left the house and went off to a solitary place to pray. Now, prayer was part of the daily life of Jesus, but when the scriptures mention particularly Jesus going off to pray, it's usually significant.

and the reason in this case is made clear. Jesus did not share the general delight because it was part of the old temptation that the devil had used in the desert.

Make these stones into bread or jump down from the pinnacle of the temple and everyone will follow you. It would have been easy for Jesus to gain a following just by healing and performing miracles, but that was not his ministry.

When Simon and the others woke up, we're told they went off to find Jesus and tried to drag him back to continue the good work. Everyone is looking for you, they said.

[13 : 39] But Jesus had beaten this particular temptation and his reply must have shocked them. Let us go somewhere else to the nearby villages so I can preach there also.

That is why I have come. This is one of the most important sayings of Jesus for an understanding of his ministry.

Jesus tells us that his primary purpose was to preach about the kingdom of God, the healings, the miracles.

They were designed to demonstrate his power and to identify him as the son of God. God, but his real mission was to preach the good news.

He didn't want people to follow him in the hope of seeing a miracle. He wanted people to repent of their sins and turn to God for forgiveness.

[14 : 52] For Jesus, preaching took priority over healing. God, and then the second part of our passage, the demon possessed man.

While they were going out, a man who was demon possessed and could not talk was brought to Jesus. And when the demon was driven out, the man who had been mute spoke.

Now, just as with the miracles of healing, there are numerous instances in the gospel of the casting out of evil spirits.

But the main point I want to bring out of this story is the reaction of the Pharisees. Listen again to verses 33 and 34.

And when the demon was driven out, the man who had been mute spoke. The crowd was amazed and said, nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel.

[16 : 09] But the Pharisees said, it is by the prince of demons that he drives out demons. Now, this was not the only occasion in Matthew's gospel where the Pharisees accused Jesus of being demon possessed.

It was a similar incident a few chapters later. Then they brought him a demon possessed man who was blind and mute and Jesus healed him so that he could both talk and see.

And all the people were astonished and said, could this be the son of David? David. When the Pharisees heard this, they said it's only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons.

And the same accusation in John's gospel, chapter 8, Jesus says, he who belongs to God hears what God said.

The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God. And they answered him, are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon possessed?

[17 : 29] The combination of the two insults, you're a Samaritan and the Jews hated the Samaritans and you are demon possessed, showed how angry these people were.

John 10, the Jews were again divided. Many of them said, he is demon possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?

How did Jesus respond to this? Well, in Mark 3, Jesus addresses the challenge directly.

He says, how can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.

And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand. I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven.

[18 : 38] But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven. He said this because they were saying, he has an evil spirit.

You see the point? These Pharisees looked at Jesus and all they could see was the devil. They were so far gone in their sin and in their opposition to Jesus that all they could see was the devil.

When Peter was writing to Christians, he recognized the significance of the work of the devil. Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

resist him standing firm in the faith. Or the apostle John, he who does what is sinful is of the devil.

Remember, the devil is not some kind of equal and opposite of God. It's not as if God and the devil are somehow two powers which are equal power.

[20 : 02] The devil is a mere fallen angel. God is in control. God is the sovereign Lord. But the devil knows that he's beaten and thrashes out against Jesus.

We're told in James, resist the devil and he will flee. from you. Now, as I come to a conclusion, I want to note that there are two kinds of blindness in our passage.

There is the blindness of the two men who were healed, but there is also the spiritual blindness of the Pharisees and that was ultimately much worse.

Jesus once said of the Pharisees, they are blind guides and if a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into the pit.

You see, the devil can blind people. 2nd Corinthians 4, the God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

[21 : 33] I believe that there is a spiritual blindness afflicting the church today, which is similar to that of the Pharisees.

I believe that there are many people in our churches who simply do not understand the meaning and significance of the gospel, that they are spiritually blind.

And Jesus is able to cure that kind of spiritual blindness, but many appear not to want to be cured.

The greatest need in our church today is for a spiritual renewal and revival so that people would once again turn their hearts and minds to those things that really matter, to those that are of eternal significance.

When someone becomes a Christian, their eyes are opened so that they can see Jesus as he really is and be delivered from spiritual blindness, we must pray for those who are in that condition and we must examine our own hearts to be sure that we do not sometimes show spiritual blindness, but Jesus can heal and Jesus can save and we must look to him.

[23 : 15] Amen. Thank you.