

A Dark World's Light

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- [0 : 0 0] The first verse of the most famous hymn, probably ever written, goes something like this. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.
- I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind, but now I see. I think that captures the heart of our passage in John chapter 9 better than any other words I could come up with.
- Amazing grace breaking into the world, causing a great reversal where those who are lost are found and those who are blind see.
- John chapter 9, you see, is all about what happens when the light of the world shines in the darkness and breaks into our lives. And when Jesus shows up and is determined to do the work of God.
- And at the heart of this drama, man, this passage is dripping with drama. I mean, it begins with a heartwarming healing.
- [0 : 5 9] It ends up with a cold-blooded court case, goes to a ruthless excommunication, and has a crazy reversal at the end. This thing is dripping with drama. And yet, at the very core of it is this gospel message that when Jesus Christ breaks into the world, he brings about reversal that we've never seen happen before.
- And all I want to do with us in the next few minutes is just show us two reversals in this passage. A reversal of sight and a reversal of judgment. First, the reversal of sight.
- You may think this one's fairly obvious. Look at verses 6 and 7. Having said these things, Jesus spit 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 scent. So he went and washed and came back seeing.
- It seems pretty simple, right? A man physically blind, and Jesus puts some mud on him, tells him to wash, and he comes back seeing. Now, why does Jesus use mud in this particular instance?
- [2 : 0 6] Well, my best guess is that Jesus is using mud because he's trying to do something that is very reminiscent of Genesis 2, verse 7. Where God makes Adam out of the dust of the ground, creates him, and then breathes life into him.
- And so Jesus actually gets his hands dirty in the dust and mud of the ground and puts it on him, as if he is doing an act of completely new creation. Jesus is not giving this man something that he's had before, but he's lost.
- Jesus is giving this man something he has never experienced before, sight, for the very first time. And what's the result? At the end of verse 7, he came back seeing.
- Now, the Greek word here, let me indulge just a little bit, is blepo or anablepo. It's this one verb for seeing, and it refers specifically to physical sight, having the ability to see.
- And it shows up 13 times in our passage, and that's to match the 13 times that the word blind shows up in our passage. As if to say, blindness is completely converted into sight.

[3 : 16] And so he gets physical sight. It's a wonderful gift from God. Wonderful, gracious gift from God. But I want to suggest to you that that is actually not the primary sight that's given in this passage.

John chapter 9 is actually about a fundamentally different sort of sight. And the word that John uses for it is a different word. It's horao. It's a sight word that is not just having the ability to see, but it emphasizes on who or what do you see.

It's deeply relational. It's deeply intimate. It's deeply personal. That's why at the end of the Bible, in Revelation chapter 22, verse 4, when it says, we shall see God face to face, it doesn't use blepo.

It uses horao, because that is deeply relational, seeing. And the word horao doesn't show up 13 times like the other word. It shows up twice in our passage at two very, very key moments.

And the first one is in verse 1. As he passed by, Jesus saw, horao, a man blind from birth.

[4 : 27] And then verses 35 to 37. You go to the bottom of the passage. Jesus has heard that they've cast this man out. And having found him, he says, do you believe in the Son of Man?

Verse 36, he answers, and who is he, Lord, that I may believe in him? Then verse 37 is it. Jesus says, you have seen him, horao, and it is he who is now speaking to you.

In verse 1, the passage begins with Jesus seeing a man. And then in verse 37, it ends with a man getting to see his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

And this is the reversal of the passage. It is deeply relational. And it is a picture of the Christian journey from start to finish. The Christian journey, friends, doesn't start out with us seeing Jesus and seeking him.

It starts with Jesus seeking us and seeing us. And then the end of the Christian journey is us actually getting to see our Lord face to face. And that's the great reversal process that we see in our passage.

[5 : 31] Now, this sounds kind of neat and tidy, doesn't it, at first? But in reality, and as we experience it in our lives, this is a really messy, long process from beginning to end.

It's not a journey of quick triumph, but of slow progress. And we see this in the man's faith throughout the passage. He doesn't really get it at first. But over time, he comes to a deeper and deeper understanding of who this Lord is that is actually healing him.

So let's look at his progression. Look at verse 11. He answers the neighbors who are questioning him. He says, The man called Jesus.

He just thinks of Jesus as a man. Made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, Go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed and received my sight.

And then a bit later on, he's questioned by the Pharisees. And at the end of verse 17, his understanding of Jesus increases. He says, He is a prophet. He can actually speak the words of God.

[6 : 32] Then if you go to verse 25, he's questioned a second time by the Pharisees. And he answers, Whether Jesus is a sinner, I do not know. But one thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see.

So Jesus goes from being a man to a prophet to now someone who can heal. And then look at verse 30. It's the third time he answers the Pharisees. He says, Why, this is an amazing thing.

You do not know where Jesus 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 more blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing. So all of a sudden, you get man, prophet, healer from God.

And finally, when Jesus Christ asks him a question, he says in verse 38, Lord, I believe. And he falls down and he worships.

[7 : 38] He worships the Lord. See, what we find out here, brothers and sisters, is that the Christian life is not quick and easy. It's not about having all the answers.

It's not about a one-time event or experience or prayer. The Christian life is about honesty about who Jesus is, even if we know very little, every single step of the way.

And coming to greater and greater and deeper and deeper understanding of him. You see, I think this should be a fairly decent comfort in our lives.

I think this should be a comfort. Because it means a couple things. It means simply that we can trust God with our own spiritual progress. We don't need to act like we're people that have it all together.

We can actually admit our difficulties and our questions and our failures and our failures. And we can admit that we don't have it figured out and we can release that sense of pressure and pretense that we often carry with ourselves as Christians.

[8 : 40] And the second comfort that I think this is to us is that we can trust God with the spiritual progress of other people. Our friends. Our family.

If you are parents out there, your kids. Our fellow Christians. We don't need to be anxious about them and then that leads us to trying to control them.

We don't need to be impatient, which leads us to anger. And we don't need to be judgmental, which leads us to cynicism. Because God is at work in every single one of us. And we may be at different places on the journey, but we're all going towards the same destination.

And that's to see the face of the same Lord and Savior who's healing us. And so what this does for us is seeing this journey, it actually allows us to trust God with our own spiritual life and with that of others.

Because the Christian journey is more like a lifelong journey down a long, winding path towards new life. It starts in blindness and it ends in full sight.

[9 : 43] Now, in the end, it's not our initiative that causes and even completes this great reversal. We have to hold true to Jesus.

But in the end, from beginning to end, it's actually Jesus' initiative that allows us to hold true to him. Jesus takes the initiative every step of the way in our passage.

You can see this at the very beginning in verse 1. He passed by and he saw a man from birth and he seeks him out. Now, this man is a blind beggar.

He can't see Jesus. He doesn't know where the source of life is. And I think John intends this to be a picture of the human spiritual condition apart from Jesus Christ.

We're blind to the truth and grace of God and we're looking for life all over the place, but we don't know where the real source of life is. And we're left begging for some hope or some ray of light from sources that are never fully going to satisfy us.

[10 : 44] And the most difficult part of our situation as human beings is that our blindness blinds us to the fact that we're blind. It's a sobering picture of the human condition without God.

And that's why at every step of the way, Jesus Christ has to take the initiative or there's no hope for us. He must be the one who heals. He must be the one who initiates.

Now, this truth is hard for us to swallow, but I think it's just more comfort heaped onto the pile of comfort. If we can't see Jesus in our lives, it doesn't mean he's not there.

Jesus could very well be seeing us right where we're at before we ever have the ability to see him. And we can actually look back upon all the sin and all the sorrow and all the difficulty and all the darkness of our lives and recognize that in those times when we thought we were most alone, we were not actually alone.

Because Jesus saw us and he was determined to come find us and heal us. Jesus sees us, brothers and sisters, before we can ever see him. I remember kind of coming to a experiential awareness of this through watching the conversion of one of my friends in first year university.

[12 : 08] I showed up on the scene to a place called Santa Clara University in California, thinking I was going to be in a nice quiet dorm where I could study all the time and go to bed early and do all that good stuff.

And I show up to this dorm and as I'm putting out my blue comforter as every first university student does, I look across the hall and it's glowing pink. And I discover that I'm in a co-ed dorm, which was a surprise, first of all.

And then I quickly discovered after the first night that I was actually on the biggest party hall in the whole entire campus. And they were all students that were older than I am and it just turned into an utter gong show.

And I was the only Christian in my whole building, for that matter. So what happened is I had an opportunity to share my faith with pretty much everybody over the course of the year. But there was one guy, man, there was one guy who was a thorn in my side.

I would share the faith with him and he would resist it and resist it more than anybody at the entire school. And it's because he loved money. He invited me to his room one time to like play guitar.

[13 : 12] And I show up and he has painted on his walls posters of the 20 richest people in the world and how much money they make. And he told me, he said, the reason why I don't want to become a Christian is because you got to choose between God or money when it comes down to who you're going to serve.

And I want to be rich. And it's interesting, this guy used to knock on my door at one, two in the morning and just argue with me about who Jesus is. Argue, argue, argue all the time. And I thought this was the last guy in the whole entire world that was ever going to become a Christian.

And lo and behold, after eight months of extreme resistance, I get a phone call from him after church and he says, Jordan, I've become a Christian.

I'm like, well, who told you to do that? And he said, nobody. He said, I just said, gee, I just sensed Jesus was actually breaking into my life.

And it's amazing because after the course of sharing my faith with tons of people that year, he was the only person that became a Christian. It was this one guy. And it taught me that salvation begins with the initiative of Jesus Christ.

[14 : 25] And there's nobody too far gone for him to take the initiative and actually heal their lives. See, friends, Jesus takes the initiative at the beginning, but he also does it at the end.

Look at verse 35. Jesus heard that they cast him out and having found him. Let's pause right there.

See, friends, when we become Christians, we often think that life is going to get better for us. It didn't for this man. Becoming a Christian meant standing up in the midst of opposition.

And when the opposition got so intense, what did they do? They said, we want to silence him and they kicked him out of the community that supported him and that raised him and that was his place of fellowship and friendship and belonging and relationship.

So this man is healed at the beginning of the passage, but at the end of the passage, he is a healed man who can see, but he is alone. He's rejected and he's all by himself.

[15 : 28] And Jesus, once again, takes the initiative. He goes searching for the rejected man. Verse 35. When Jesus heard when Jesus heard that this man was cast out, he went and found him.

You see, Jesus welcomes in those who are cast out and he's not content just with healing us and leaving us alone. He wants to find, welcome us, and bring us into a personal, face-to-face relationship and fellowship.

And that's why I think one of the old archbishops, Archbishop William Temple from the 19th century, he said this was the heart of the Christian faith. He said, the man who is driven out by the court is not left to wander as an outcast.

Jesus found him. The man did not find Jesus. Jesus found him. That is the deepest truth of Christian faith. Jesus found me.

See, Jesus seeks and he sees and he finds and he takes the initiative the whole entire way. And I remember experiencing this kind of in my own life with a connected family member.

[16 : 42] Connected family member who grew up with in the church, had a father who was a pastor and partway about middle age through life felt so hurt and rejected by the church in a sense that decided to kind of slide into apathy and disengage completely from the church and it seemed from Jesus Christ to some extent.

And I wondered if this person would ever return again. It was 10, 15 years. The interesting thing is that one person pursued him. One person pursued him after about 15 years, invited him to join a Bible study for a year and week after week just opened the Bible with this man and showed him who Jesus is.

week after week this man experienced Jesus pursuing him through this discipleship relationship and over the course of that one year there was a reversal in his life that never thought was possible again.

The following year the man started leading a Bible study because he wanted other people to see what he finally saw about the Lord. And the following year the man became the head of the elder board and was actually starting to bless the church in ways that he had never imagined before.

The very church that he had felt so rejected by. And you see brothers and sisters this is an example of a man who not only experienced Jesus pursuing him at the beginning of his life but also at the end of his life when so many people had written him off.

[18 : 13] Because Jesus takes the initiative from beginning to end and he is the one who wants to bring a great reversal of sight into our lives so that we who are blind will get to see our living Lord.

But John 9 is not just a story of healing and sight it's also a story of judgment intense judgment and so that's the second reversal of our passage not just a reversal of sight but a reversal of judgment when the light shines into the world we see that it creates a crisis we're not going to read through it again because Michael did it so well but verses 8 to 34 are just one big court case because what happens when the light shines in the darkness the darkness takes the light to court and that's what we see this man is healed and his friends start questioning him and the one who healed him and then this man is dragged into the court of the authorities and Pharisees and they question him how did you get healed who healed you and then they bring in witnesses his parents and they question him and then they bring in the blind man again and they question him and it's this one huge court case that ends in verse 34 when they make their judgment you blind man who can now see you're a sinner and so is the one who healed you verse 34 cast you out get rid of you but the great reversal comes in verses 35 to 31

Jesus finds the cast out man and he asks him a very interesting question he says do you believe in the son of man now for those of you that are astute bible scholars you know that son of man is a very interesting title for Jesus to use for himself it is a title that has a connotation of judgment it's a title that comes from a vision in Daniel chapter 7 where the ancient of days which represents God and all of his authority the son of man comes to the ancient of days and the ancient of days gives the son of man all power and authority and glory and dominion to rule all the nations of the earth and be the judge of the entire world and if you think I'm making this stuff up flip over to John chapter 5 verse 22 and I'll show you that Jesus himself actually understands this title this way John chapter 5 verse 22 Jesus says the father judges no one but has given all judgment to the son and then skip down to verse 27 and he has given him authority to execute judgment because he is the son of man do you believe in the son of man says Jesus in verse 35 do you believe in the true judge of the world the man answers in verse 36 well who is he

I don't know him once again our whole passage comes to this key question who is Jesus and in verse 37 Jesus says you have seen him he's standing right in front of him right in front of you and I'm talking to you I am the true judge of the world so it's as if this whole passage it's been a court case where Jesus is being judged at the very last minute Jesus stands up and says actually I'm the judge and my judgment is very different than the judgment you just made the judgment is in verse 39 for judgment I came into this world says Jesus those are chilling words that those who do not see may see and that those who see may become blind some of the Pharisees heard him say these things and they said to him are we blind also and Jesus said to them explaining what he said earlier if you were blind you would have no guilt but now that you say we see your guilt remains see this is a great reversal of judgment because what Jesus says is he says to those who are blind who say they are blind he says actually you are the ones that can really see because you recognize your own blindness you recognize your desperate need for healing and help and so Jesus loves to give to you spiritual and relational sight he loves to give you mercy he loves to heal you because you recognize you need it you know you're blind so you actually see and then he says to those who say we can see we've got life figured out we don't need the grace of Jesus Christ we don't need his light he says actually you are the blind people because you don't recognize that you're blind you're fine without me and it's on you it's you who still have to carry your sin and your guilt because you've chosen to love the darkness instead of the light see friends this is a sobering reality it's what Jesus is saying to us is that we have to go undergo kind of two conversions we have to undergo a conversion from thinking we can see to realizing that we're actually utterly blind without Jesus Christ and then once we experience that conversion he can take us from being utterly blind and give us true sight as an act of grace because God opposes the proud but he gives grace to the humble and this is the upside down nature of the kingdom of God

Jesus Christ came to seek the lost to save sinners and to give blight give sight to the blind so if you want to be a part of Jesus kingdom Jesus is saying you have to be lost you have to be a sinner you got to recognize that you're blind so the question that it poses to us is do you think you can see without the light of Christ in your life if so then you're really blind and do you think you're blind without the light of Christ in your life because if so then you can truly see and this is the great reversal that Jesus wants to bring into the world and few people have known this better than the great pastor John Newton from the 18th century he was born in London in 1725 I'm going to finish with this story for those of you that are wondering his mother died at 7 years old and his dad took him out to sea for the first time at age 11 and he at a young age quickly became involved in the slave trading business he would go searching he eventually became a captain of a slave ship that would go searching up the coast of Guinea and Sierra Leone on the coast of Africa looking for Africans to capture and sell into slavery and some estimate that tens of thousands were captured in his day he was called by his shipmates the blasphemer because his mates they were shocked by how reckless he was absolutely shocked and in the middle of a storm and when he was 37 39 years old

[25 : 32] I forget which one in 1748 there was a huge storm and he woke up in the middle of the night and all of a sudden realized I could die that would be horrible and he cries out for the very first time in the middle of this storm Lord have mercy on me and he makes it through the 12 hours of the storm and eventually he moves to London in the financial district after becoming a pastor and he becomes a pastor and this old slave capture this one who captured people and turned them into slaves was living in London and he started preaching the gospel and he started fighting against slave trade in his day he supported William Wilberforce who was the person that eventually got the abolition of the slave trade in England and he told William Wilberforce you shouldn't go into pastoral ministry because you need to stay in politics and he was this man that as he came to the end of his life he actually started to go blind and he started losing his memory and to one of his friends who came to him towards the end of his life as he was dying he said this my memory is nearly gone but I remember two things that I am a great sinner number one and that number two that Christ is a great savior and it's this man who in his old age was becoming blind who wrote those words that we began with amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me

I once was lost but now I'm found was blind but actually now I see see friends that's the sort of reversal that God wants for all of us and so may God give us grace so that all our lives we may be able to sing this song amazing grace until the day that we see the Lord face to face in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit Amen