

The Fearless Blind Man

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: 28 January 2018

Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[0:00] Good morning, everyone. Morning, morning. If you're new, my name's Aaron, and I'm one of the ministers on staff here. So we are looking at John 9, and I love, love, I just love this story. I love this story so much.

It's dripping with irony, and the dialogue is so clever, but I love it also because it's a true story, and I love it because it's a wonderful metaphor for what Christ has done in our hearts if we are Christians.

So what I want to do is I want us to just go over the story, like a quick overview of the story. There's six scenes. Scene one.

Jesus and his disciples are passing a blind man, and it would seem that Jesus stops and looks at this man, and then the disciples start talking about him, and they're trying to get to the bottom of like, you know, whose fault is this? Why is this man blind? Is he blind because he sinned, or is he blind because his parents sinned?

And I have to admit, I feel a bit sorry for this guy. He's probably sitting there going, I can totally hear you. Have you been in that situation? Like, people will talk about you when you're right there.

[1:17] Yeah, I think it tends to happen to people who are older and when you're quite young. I have a vivid memory of being like eight years old and aunties coming over, and I'm in the living room, and they're talking to my mum in the living room going, don't worry, June. That's my mum's name, June. Don't worry, June. He'll fill out.

Lies. Lies. So the disciples are saying, so who sinned here? Was it him or his parents? And Jesus says, neither. Neither. That's not the issue here. What Jesus is correcting is this idea that there's this very tight relationship between personal sin and personal suffering. In other words, personal suffering doesn't always happen because of personal sin. In general, the world doesn't work properly because humanity is turned from God. So sin causes suffering as a universal rule, but individual suffering is not always attributable to someone's personal sin. There are cases when there are, obviously, but it's not always. There are causes of suffering. Some of them are your fault, some of them are not. Then still with his eyes on this man, Jesus says, this man is blind so that God will be glorified. Jesus says, this God's got a plan for this man, a plan that is so wonderful and outweighs the years of blindness that he had to endure. And then the story continues. Christ heals the man in this sort of odd but wonderful way. And then there's this huge, huge controversy.

controversy. And as a result of the controversy, some hearts are changed and some hearts are shown to be dark. There are two trajectories in the passage. And it plays out sort of like this.

The formerly blind man becomes clearer and clearer and clearer on who Jesus is. The blind man sees. And he becomes stronger and stronger and more courageous in his defending of Christ to the point that he becomes a danger to the Pharisees. And the Pharisees, well, their hearts just become more and more stuck in the darkness. And the whole thing is this great picture of what Jesus said when he said, I'm the light of the world. And he said it a number of times. He said it a lot. And that lightness to others, to some it brings light and life and goodness. And to others, it just exposes darkness.

Back to the story. So that's scene one. Scene two, after the healing, verses eight to 12, the man's with his neighbors. And the neighbors just cannot get their head around this. They don't even believe it's the same guy because of the change. But the beggar, the beggar, he says very clearly, no, no, no. A man called Jesus healed me. It's important. I want you to remember that line.

[4 : 14] A man called Jesus healed me. Scene three, the neighbors bring the beggar to the Pharisees. That's the kind of thing you would do. Something miraculous has happened. Let's bring it to the authorities, the religious elite. They need to see this, make a determination. So these rulers, they interrogate the man who again very clearly says, he put mud in my eyes and I washed and I see. Now there's a disagreement amongst these religious leaders. Some say, well, a man of God wouldn't heal on the Sabbath. That's a no, no. You don't do that kind of thing. And others say, yes, but healing a blind man, that's a pretty good trick. This is a big deal. So they turned to the beggar and they said, well, who do you think Jesus is? And he said, well, he's a prophet. So straight away, we've got a progression, haven't we? And this man's understanding of who Jesus is. Scene four, 18 to 22. So the Pharisees filled with this great sense of self-importance, right? Simply do not believe that this man was blind and now he sees. So they look for a loophole. Perhaps this is a case of fraud, like sort of like an insurance fraud kind of thing. So they call the parents in. Is this your son? Yes. Yes. Was he blind? Yes. Yes. From birth? Yep. How do you explain this? No, leave us out of this. Leave us out of this.

They're very evasive. And they're evasive because they're fearful. They don't want to be kicked out of the synagogue, which would happen if you gave us even this hint that you thought Jesus was special.

And getting kicked out of the synagogue doesn't just mean you can't go to church on Sundays. It's like you're losing your job and having your credit cards all cut up and your credit rating tanking all on the same day. The synagogue was the heart of civic life and religious life, social life.

You get kicked out of the synagogue. You are on the margins. Moving on. So faced with the overwhelming evidence that this beggar was blind, but now he sees, it's definitely him, the parents have confirmed it, the Pharisees, they just don't want to take this. They cannot believe this. So they haul the beggar back in and they go, okay, let's go over this one more time. Scene five. It's a great scene.

We know, the Pharisees say, it's a great start, isn't it? We know for a fact that this man is a sinner. They're so entrenched, aren't they? Despite the evidence. And the beggar says, listen, I don't know if he's a sinner, but I know he healed me. And they say, well, how? And he goes, look, I've already told you this. You seem very interested. Perhaps you want to be his disciple. They just, you know, this beggar just throws that out to the religious elite. Just throws it out there. Well, this is too much for the religious leaders. And they huff and they puff about their heritage. And the beggar says, this is just amazing to me. This whole thing is so amazing. He healed me. It's so obviously a God thing.

[7 : 24] You call him a sinner and you have no idea who he is. And the Pharisees are pushed over the edge by this uppity, lippy, illiterate beggar. But they can't defend their position. So they take the rhetorical strategy called ad hominem. You can't make the argument. So you attack the person and they just insult him. They say, you were born in utter sin and you would dare to teach us. And they cast him out.

So the beggar is excommunicated. Jesus hears about this in scene six. He seeks the beggar out. And he's opened the eyes of the beggar physically. And now he opens the eyes of the beggar spiritually.

The man sees this is the Lord. Calls Jesus the Lord and worships him. And then Jesus summarizes all that's happened in verse 39. He says this, For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind. What does that mean? Those who do not see may see. That's the story of the beggar, isn't it?

And those who see may be blind. That's the story of the Pharisees. This is the passage. Now let's step back. What are the big themes? Let me read the final verse of John's gospel to you. It says this, Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book.

But these, these ones, are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. So of all of the amazing, miraculous things that Christ did, John, I think, only records seven. And he chose particular ones because they happened and because they symbolized something that Jesus came to do. So what does this story symbolize?

[9 : 23] This wonderful story. It's very simple. It's one point. We are blind until our eyes are opened by Jesus. We are blind until our eyes are opened by Jesus. And the truth is expressed through these stories, through the trajectories of the two main human characters, the blind man and the Pharisees.

So let's look at the blind man. And it's very important to note he was born blind. He was born blind. He was always blind. He wasn't seeking Jesus out. He didn't know Jesus didn't come back to him.

He was born blind. Jesus sought him out. Jesus healed him. Jesus opened his physical eyes, then his spiritual eyes. And this man grows in his courage and his clarity and joy, it seems. I think he was enjoying himself with the Pharisees. I love this guy. I love him. He just kept telling the truth about the truth about what happened to him. And we see him, he moves from calling Jesus just the man to the prophet, to the Lord. And this man is us. This man is everyone here who was a Christian.

Before they met Christ, we were blind. Now the Pharisees, they are not in this story for us to despise. We're not meant to go boo every time they enter stage right.

They help us see the truth that we are blind unless Jesus opens our eyes. And to make that point in the story, Jesus doesn't pit this formerly blind man against some, you know, pagan, godless pagans or some atheists or something like that. He pits this blind man against the religious elite, people who are blind.

[11 : 44] Sight to the blind is the kind of thing the coming Messiah would do. The Old Testament talks about that. If anyone should have understood who Jesus was, it was them. They should have got it.

It should have been them. But they are not having a bar of Jesus. They were so completely committed to their own ideas, despite the evidence, despite the inconvenient truth that the beggar kept resenting them.

I was blind. And now I see. There was this illogical refusal to look at it though. The Pharisees acted like blind men, didn't they?

That's the great irony of the story. It is true that people who don't believe, believe. They see clearly. Spurgeon, old preacher, a long time ago, he said this.

Folks, if you were here and you were not a Christian, you know I've been telling you you're blind, right?

[13 : 03] You get that. And that can be very offensive to you. And you might be angry with me. I understand that. Some, you know, foreigner coming up here telling you what you should know.

Can I just say this to you with great respect? I just want to say, don't be like the Pharisees. The evidence for Christ is enormous.

And I would simply ask that you look at it. Like Galileo, his telescope's set up and he's talking to his friends, his fellow professors, and he's going, if you just look through the telescope, I can prove to you the solar system revolves around the sun.

If you just, I mean, honestly, just have a look through and you'll see it. But, no. Folks, the evidence for Christ is enormous.

If you're here and you're not a Christian, I'd invite you to keep coming back. Maybe join a small group and talk to your friends. But hear about Christ. Weigh it up. Okay, what do we take from all this?

[14 : 16] I just have two points to make. Firstly, great thankfulness. Great thankfulness. If you're a Christian here, we were blind from birth until Jesus opened our eyes.

We would have never come to Christ on our own, given a hundred chances, given a million chances we would not have come to Christ. Christ opened our eyes.

He sought us out. And that is a baseline belief that should keep us from arrogance and pride. Secondly, as well as thankfulness, I think I want to say, this is quite helpful to know that we should not be surprised when Christians face hostility.

Hostility. The greater the biggest clarity, it seems, the greater the hostility he faced. There are going to be repercussions in coming to faith.

For some, it will be confusing. For others, they'll see it as a rebuke of their own beliefs. It's going to be an offense to them. We shouldn't be surprised by this. I'm not saying all your conversations about Christ are going to be these angry, hostile things, but some of them might be.

[15 : 22] Don't be surprised when it happens. We see in the passage, the bigger paid a price, and he seemed quite happy to pay that price. He knew what the cost would be. He was kicked out of the synagogue. And the cost was welded to the fact that he kept telling the truth.

He wouldn't budge from the truth. I was blind, but now I see. He kept saying it over and over again, and I love the simplicity of it. He didn't understand everything.

Didn't get it all. But what he did know, he kept confessing, and he wouldn't budge on it. And the Pharisees wanted him to lie. The Pharisees wanted him to deny it.

And it would have gone a lot easier for him, but he wouldn't. And it is a great temptation for us, I think, to keep quiet, to keep the peace when it comes to our faith. We don't want the hassle or the grief that might come as a result of sharing the fact that I was blind, but now I see.

We don't want people to dislike us. We don't want to be kicked out of a social group. We don't want to be marginalized. It's one of the reasons I love this story so much.

[16 : 30] This formerly blind beggar, this illiterate, poorest of the poor, the marginalized of the marginalized, he got more marginalized. He is such an unlikely inspiration for us and such a wonderful example to us, an inspiration and example for us all to continue to be truth tellers.

Amen. Amen.