

John 9:1-23

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[0:00] Please take a seat. My name is Ryan. It's a privilege I have to serve with youth and young adults here at St. John's. I'm really looking forward to spending some time with you in God's Word tonight.

Would you join me in prayer as we get ready to dive right in? Oh, Father, we thank you for your Word. We thank you for your servant, John, and how the Holy Spirit moved in him, and how we have these words today to challenge and inspire us.

I ask you to give us open ears, open eyes, open hearts, and ready wills. In your name we pray. Amen. This is a fantastic passage, John 9.

I was trying to think of a word to describe it just now, and the only word that came to mind is Jesus is like, he's kind of being like a punk, but in the best possible way. He has just been cornered.

They tried to kill him, and instead of running away and hiding, he's continuing to provoke the people around him, provoking them to show them who he is and what he's here to do.

[1:14] So this passage in chapter 9 is like a living parable. It's like a form of a performance art where he's shining a huge spotlight on what he's been talking about in the past few chapters.

He announced in the middle of this huge festival, the Feast of Tabernacles, where people celebrate light, he announced in the middle that at the very end, the pinnacle of the celebration, he said, I am the light of the world.

Now, it's kind of a sneaky way he was telling them a little bit about, hey, I'm more than just the person you see in front of you. But then a few chapters later, he gets into this huge debate with the Pharisees about whose father is who.

There's a lot of intense name calling, and in no uncertain terms, he tells them, I am. Now, these two words, these three letters, two words, is the personal name of God that was revealed to Moses in Exodus.

Now, something like this could not have been misinterpreted. The charge for this kind of statement? Blasphemy. The penalty? Death. But it was not yet his time, the word tells us.

[2:26] So earlier, he was teaching them about light, and now he's teaching them about blindness. And that's what we're going to talk about. Blindness. It's going to show up in at least three ways.

There's a ton of other ways you could find blindness in here, but we're going to focus on three. First, the blindness of the disciples, which will invite us to see others as Jesus sees them.

And secondly, the blindness of the man born blind displays how we come to see Jesus. And third, the blindness of the Pharisees warns us about how we see ourselves.

The disciples, the man, and the Pharisees. So first of all, let's talk about the blindness of the disciples and how it invites us to see others as Jesus does. Now, when we don't see others the way Jesus does, we're bound to ask the wrong questions.

So beautifully and hilariously displayed in our youth talk earlier. You saw a little bit about what that meant, asking the wrong questions. Now, I'm going to date myself a little bit here. My dad raised me right, and I watched Pink Panther growing up, the Peter Sellers Pink Panther.

[3 : 31] Everyone know what I'm talking about? The infamous Inspector Jacques Clouseau. There's this scene that we quote all the time in our family. He's in a shop. There's a little dog next to him, and he turns to the shopkeeper, and he says, Does your dog bite?

And the shopkeeper turns to him and says, No. So Inspector Clouseau, he bends down to pet the little dog, and the dog immediately bites his hand. He stands up, outraged, and he turns to the shopkeeper and says, I thought you said your dog does not bite.

And the shopkeeper says, That is not my dog. A classic example of asking the wrong question. But back to the disciples now.

First of all, look in verse 1. Notice who sees the man first in our story. Before they ask a question, who sees the man first?

It says here, As he, as Jesus, passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And then the disciples ask their question.

[4 : 36] And we soon learn that they're asking the wrong kind of question. They turn to Jesus and they say, Who sinned? This man or his parents?

Now, I can think of at least two reasons why they might ask this kind of question. The first reason seems kind of plausible. Like an honest question.

How do we explain suffering? How do we make sense of it? Because there's this desire to kind of fit together these things. God's goodness, God's power, and the wrongs we see all around us.

So on the one hand, it seems like a natural question. Of course, of course we'd want to know what causes this. But asking questions that way sometimes turns people into abstractions, into ideas, into something to be discussed.

This is a danger the disciples' blindness led them to. They saw the man as a problem to be solved, not a person to be healed. But Jesus had other plans than an intellectual discussion about suffering.

[5 : 46] Now, that might have been their first reason. Maybe not its question. They really want to know, What's the root cause of suffering? But the second reason they might have asked, and I think this is closer to their motivation, is, Why does this man deserve the situation he's in?

Notice the nature of their question. Who sinned? Whose fault? And it basically boils down to an attitude that people deserve what they get.

It's either their own fault, who sinned, this man, or it's fate, their circumstances, his parents. And here's the tricky thing. When it's someone else's fault, it's their own problem.

But for Jesus, this man's suffering was his opportunity to display the works of God. So while the disciples are blind to this man and to the opportunity in front of them, Jesus shows them something of who he is and what he's here to do.

You see, there was a prophecy in Isaiah about the hoped-for Messiah hundreds of years before. Isaiah wrote down words from the Lord our God, I will give you as a covenant for the people, as a promise, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison, those who sit in darkness.

[7 : 19] I am the Lord that is my name. So while Jesus is physically and literally opening the eyes of the blind man, he's also opening the spiritual eyes of the disciples to show them who he is, to show them what the works of God are, and to give them eyes to see others as he does.

So when we see Jesus rightly, we see others rightly, and we ask better questions. Not who sinned, but how will God be glorified through this?

And assigning fault or intellectualizing a person's suffering distances us from needing to do anything about it. This is intimidating.

But one way to respond to this is in humble prayer. Lord, give us eyes to see others as you see them. Not as abstractions or opportunities for theological debates, but so that the works of God might be displayed.

So that's point number one. That's our first group of blindness, the blindness of the disciples, which invites us to see others as Jesus does. Secondly, we're going to talk about the blindness of the man born blind and how it shows us our spiritual condition and how we come to see Jesus.

[8 : 46] So first, notice an important detail here. This man was blind from birth. There's an interesting parallel here from an earlier story. Remember the man healed at the pool? He had been there for 38 years.

Basically communicating this is an impossible task. And notice this man does not speak in the first part of the story. He doesn't say anything. He doesn't even seem to ask Jesus to heal him, at least not audibly, or even give him permission to do the things he's doing.

So what are we to make about the things Jesus says? Now I've been told that when one sense is diminished, another sense makes up for it, is enhanced.

And I can only imagine that this man would have heard every subtle sound and nuance and tone of voice. So what did he hear? The first word the man heard Jesus say after the disciples asked who sinned was the word neither.

Now, in our translation, it starts with it was not that. But in Greek, it's just the word neither. Can you imagine how powerful that one word would have been to this man?

[10 : 01] Imagine how many times people would have walked by him in the temple saying the same things either directly to him or about him. Who sinned? Whose fault? Why does he deserve this?

But he hears the word neither. Secondly, he heard that the works of God were going to be displayed in him. And then he finally heard something about day and night, light and dark, now or never.

Now, first, this word neither again. I wonder how much this man ended up believing this himself after hearing it most likely from those who walked past him. Everyone's seen the animated movie Soul, where they go to the great beyond, a jazz musician.

The basic plot line is the jazz. It's been out long enough that I can spoil it. You've had enough time to watch it. This movie Soul, a jazz musician, accidentally ends up in the afterlife, Disney's imagination of what that might look like.

And during this process, they come across this part, this kind of in-between space, this land of lost souls, where people who are still alive on this earth are walking around in darkness, ruminating, repeating a phrase again and again, caught in their own shame, in their own guilt.

[11 : 23] One scene shows a salesperson stuck at a desk saying over and over again, make a sale, make a sale, make a sale. I wonder if that man was in that spot himself.

And I think he needed to have that shame cycle broken, and I wonder if that's what the word neither did. And secondly, what are these works of God Jesus talks about in verse 3?

It's kind of not entirely clear who he's talking to. We might first assume, oh, he's clearly talking to the disciples. We must do the works of God. But the disciples, this is the last part of the story where they show up.

For the rest of it, they're probably just watching along. Who's this we here? Well, I think the answer actually lies a few chapters before, in chapter 6.

Remember when Jesus fed the 5,000? They started asking all these questions, and one of the questions is, well, how do we get more bread? It's kind of an honest question. If you've got unlimited supply of bread, you want to know what's the source.

[12:21] And Jesus tells them, let's do the works of God. So they ask the next logical follow-up question, well, what are the works of God? Another example of asking the wrong question, perhaps. Then Jesus tells them what the works of God are.

He says, this is the work of God, that you believe in Him who He has sent.

This is the work of God, that you believe in Him who He has sent. So I think what Jesus is inviting all those who are hearing, and that man too, in that moment, is not to do anything, but to believe in the one who has been sent.

Jesus does the work. And finally, the blind man hears Jesus say, essentially, it's now or never. In verses 4 and 5, He talks about day and night. He's saying there's a time coming where it will no longer be day.

You can't work at night. You couldn't just turn on a light switch. Sun goes down, if you had enough candles around, maybe you could keep doing some work, but otherwise, you're heading to bed. He's saying here, there is an opportunity to respond to this invitation, but that opportunity will come and it will go, never to return.

[13:35] So those are the three things He hears. Neither, the works of God, it's now or never. Now what do we make about what Jesus does? And this is where it gets wild.

Let's talk about the gross part. All right? He spits in the mud and rubs it on His eyes. Now we don't know at this point where His eyes like, like open?

Like how much spit does it take to make a sufficient quantity of mud? Like really think about that, right? Like this is a copious amount.

It really is. It's kind of gross. Why? Why is He doing this? Well, there's two reasons. So first of all, He did it because it was work.

He's intentionally provoking those who are watching. So what other things do you have to do with your hands where you kind of knead things together? What else do you knead with your hands, right? Dough, bread dough, right?

[14:35] How do you make bricks? What do you have to mix together when you make bricks? Straw and some other kind of stuff, right? Sand, I guess. Water? Water's involved in bricks.

So Jesus knows that He's being watched, He's being observed, and He intentionally does the thing that is work. Why does He do this? Well, later, John tells us, oh, by the way, it was the Sabbath.

It's kind of an important detail. So on the Sabbath, on a day that means a lot to these Pharisees, to these rule keepers, He does an intentional act of work in the act of healing.

That explains the whole rest of the story and the Pharisees' obsession with the how question, right? Remember the story when the arm was broken, and the real question wasn't what socks are you going to be wearing.

It's like, how was your arm healed and who did it? So He did it intentionally because it was work. He wants to tell them something about who He is and what the Sabbath is for.

[15:33] The second reason I think He did this, and this is a bit more what my dad, who's a preacher, calls a sanctified imagination. I do wonder about the spit.

if it wasn't just for convenience's sake. Now we tend to use spit in certain circumstances. We tend to use spit when we're looking down on something or someone.

When Jesus was hauled before the authorities and mocked, they spit on Him. If people really believed this man's sin and condition was the result of his sin or someone else's sin, either way, he deserved it.

I wonder how many times he was spat at. But he hears the noise of spit, but it doesn't hit him. It hits the ground.

And it gets mixed in with the dirt and gets placed on his eyes. I wonder if Jesus was saying, I don't show contempt for you. I show contempt for this blindness.

[16:38] I want to heal you from that. I wonder if that's partly what the spit was for. What's amazing about this, though, is that the blind man could have said, gross, when Jesus said to him, go, go to the pool of Siloam and wash.

I'm pretty sure he was like, yeah, I'm definitely going to wash. You got that right. But he could have just said, he could have said, no, gross. I'm not going to stumble and fumble through town with like muddy spit all over my eyes.

Like, someone bring me water. But he doesn't. He obeys and he goes without saying a word. This is amazing. And now can you imagine what it must have been like the first sights he would have seen, having never seen his whole life?

Have you seen these YouTube videos where like a little child is given glasses for the first time? Has anyone seen these before? If you want to have a good cry, go on YouTube and look up like baby gets glasses for the first time.

It is beautiful. The child like looks around and there's a little bit surprise and then they lock eyes with their parent. See, I'm just getting choked up. It's just, it's so lovely.

[17:49] If you really need to have a good cry, go and do that. But I'd like to think this is what that man might have experienced times a hundred. Seeing colors, seeing people, seeing faces.

I wonder how much it was a little bit like post-COVID when you saw people with their masks off for the first time. Where he's like, oh, so that's what your face looks like. I wouldn't have paired that voice with that face.

Very interesting. But he clearly has an incredible transformation. Okay, this has been all about the man putting this all together.

What is Jesus teaching them about their spiritual blindness? So, the blindness of the man born blind displays how we see Jesus. And this man is a living parable.

Just like him, we're born blind from birth. And it's not just that we're in a dark room and need someone to turn the light on. It's we lack the ability of spiritual sight.

[18:49] But the good news is, like Jesus saw the man first, he sees us first. He makes the first move. Where we see sin or shame, Jesus sees opportunity for the work of God.

And the work we do in response, just like this man, is to believe. He showed his belief when he got up and he went to the pool and he washed. Simply that.

Now, we're going to come back to this man one more time before we close. But first, I want to move on to the Pharisees. Third is the blindness of the Pharisees. And this is a sober warning about how we see ourselves.

So, in their spiritual blindness, they're asking all sorts of wrong questions. And three of the wrong questions they ask is they are so obsessed with the how question instead of the who question. And then they ask two sadly ironic questions.

They ask the man, would you teach us? And they ask Jesus, are we also blind? So, they're obsessed with how Jesus healed him.

[19:54] Right? They're trying to catch him. They're trying to nail him down, showing that he broke a rule so they can do with him what they want. And notice that the neighbors also asked him how his eyes were opened.

The Pharisees asked him, verse 15, how did you receive your sight? They asked his parents, in verse 19, and again, they ask him, verse 26, how, how, how? Finally, the man gets fed up, and I love that scene.

You could preach a whole other sermon on just the scene where the man born blind is talking to the Pharisees. He is brilliant. They should be asking, however, who is this man?

But they're so obsessed with their own interpretation of their Sabbath law that they can't move on. Now, the reason is that they've built an entire system of intricate rule-keeping so that they can congratulate themselves on their own sense of righteousness and look with contempt, spit on, those who fall short.

This is what Jesus was talking about when he says, come to me all those who are weak and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. They're putting these impossible burdens on people.

[21:03] So that's their first wrong question, focusing on how instead of who. Secondly, they ask two tragic questions. Would you teach us? They ask the man in verse 34. They tell him, you were born in utter sin.

Sadly, that's exactly what should be happening. The irony here is reverse. The blind man is the one who now sees clearly. And yes, if they had ears to hear, they would be taught by him.

And their last tragic question towards the end of verse 34. Jesus tells the man the wonderful news of who he is and what he's come to do.

And then they say to Jesus, are we also blind? Jesus says, yes. Yes, you are. If only they would admit they are blind so they could finally see.

Why are they blind? What causes this blindness? Well, there's two verses very briefly that give us a sense of where they're coming from. First is in Proverbs 26, 12. In this chapter, it's an amazing chapter in Proverbs.

[22:11] It's all about the dangers of being foolish, right? You think the whole thing is about how bad it is to be a fool. But towards the end of this passage, Proverbs 26, 12 says, do you see a person who is wise in their own eyes?

There is more hope for a fool than for this person. Pharisees have the tragic condition of being wise in their own eyes. And secondly, in Isaiah, the same book where the prophecy came of the man who would open eyes, woe to those, Isaiah says, who are wise in their own eyes and shrewd in their own sight.

This is a very difficult position to be in and one that only Jesus can soften and fix. If we find ourselves in this position from time to time, maybe a prayer we can pray for ourselves or for someone we know who appears to be in this situation is, Lord, help us be honest with ourselves.

Not to be wise in our own eyes and justify ourselves but to be given sight. Now this is a painful prayer. I remember one time in my life where I prayed it very clearly after a very difficult interaction I had at work.

I prayed the dangerous prayer of, Lord, show me what my fault is in this. And boy, did he. So be careful. I'm serious. Be careful. If you're honestly praying for Jesus to show you, be careful.

[23:37] But the good news is Jesus was so gentle and so good. Okay, we're going to close now. We're going to land this plane. There's three ways that blindness showed up in this passage.

First, it was in the disciples. This is an invitation for us to see others as Jesus does. Secondly, the blindness of the man born blind shows how we come to see Jesus.

And finally, the blindness of the Pharisees warns us about how we see ourselves. And to close, let's return once again to the man and the second sight Jesus gives him.

Did you notice that the only one asking the right questions in our passage is the blind man? Isn't that ironic? After the man is thrown out of the temple, he says Jesus finds him.

Again, the second time he's been found. Isn't that lovely? And remember, at this point, the man has received his sight, but he has not yet laid eyes on Jesus. He still doesn't know what Jesus even looks like.

[24:37] And Jesus asks him the question that all of us are asked in one way or another, at one time or another. do you believe in the Son of Man? Which is another way of saying, do you believe that Jesus is who he says he is?

And the man asks the only good question in this entire passage. Who is Jesus that I may believe in him? And Jesus stood before him as he might be standing in front of you saying, you have seen him.

It is he who is speaking to you. Amen. Amen.