

A Dark World's Light

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[0 : 00] I'm sure that many of you fathers, as well as mothers, could identify with me when Jeremy was sharing that one of the joys as a parent is to read to your children, but when you're tired, sometimes you fall asleep.

I've lost count of the number of times that was the case with my youngest daughter, but also it reminded me of one occasion, which is connected with the Lord's Prayer of my oldest daughter, after I finished at Regent.

And I had to do some remedial work in Anglicanism, and was required to be at a morning prayer meeting out on campus at UBC at 8 o'clock in the morning. And on one occasion, I was asked to lead the prayers, and of course at the end of that, then we lead people into the Lord's Prayer.

And I was really, really tired, and Brenda was back at work, and so we were doing the thing with our children to try to make sure that we were looking after them well.

And this occasion, I was able to bring my daughter, Helen, with me. And, but though very tired, when I got to the Lord's Prayer, I said, now as our Savior's taught us, so we pray.

[1 : 07] Now I lay me down to sleep. And I pray the Lord my soul to keep. They were very gracious with me.

And now that's not, I'm not giving you permission to fall asleep this morning. And you're the late service. And the earlier you get here sometimes, the easier that is. But let's turn to John chapter 9 now.

And you know that at page number 895. Today we come to the final scene of the Feast of Tabernacles, or the Feast of Booze. And it's one of the big three feasts, but it's about more than these features of faith, or sorry, these features of water and light.

Jesus saw this as an occasion to actually reveal that he was the light of the world, and also the living water. And today's reading gets really provocative when Jesus gives sight to a man born blind, which stirs up the festival pilgrims, resulting in uncertainty, and chaos, and curiosity, and humor, and courage.

It's a real menagerie of emotions, and actions, and thoughts, and deeds. And some think this is just a really nice illustration of the spiritual world through the material one.

[2 : 26] Others think that it's a dangerous lesson that comes with a warning about true and false belief. There's two things I want to draw to our attention this morning, and the first one is this.

And that is that there is sight given to the blind by the light of the world. And the second is with respect to belief, and that is belief given to the humble by the Son of Man. So let's take it from the top then.

Let's begin with the man born blind. After Jesus escapes death by stoning, that was the end of chapter 8, He not only passes His adversaries, but He almost passes by this anonymous beggar.

Except His disciples raise this question, Who sinned, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus isn't blindsided by their question, and He answers their question in two parts.

And the first one is this in verse 3. He says, Jesus seems to have a different explanation for the blind man's condition.

[3 : 29] And the disciples wanted a moral cause for the man's condition, and they thought that they actually had it was one or the other. And we're not all that different, are we? But we, when it comes to things like this, we don't always want the moral cause, we want the medical cause.

And we're satisfied when we get the medical cause, don't we? As long as it has a remedy to it. But we're not satisfied when we don't have the medical remedy to it, and then we wonder if we have the cause right.

And we go to great lengths to find out what it is, and then we say, when we actually get a diagnosis, thank God we at least have a diagnosis. But Jesus isn't as concerned with the medical or the moral cause.

I think he looks at this condition and says, actually, there's a purposeful cause to it. So part two of Jesus' answer comes in verses 3 and 4 when he says, But that the works of God might be displayed in him.

We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. In other words, there's something much, much larger that's going on here.

[4 : 35] But what does Jesus exactly mean when he says, the works of God might be displayed in him? What does he mean by that? And if you think that Jesus means that the cause here is so that he can give him sight, well, that's true, but only partly true.

There's something more at stake here. There's this greater purpose that Jesus, I think, has in mind with respect to this. And if that's the case, then what exactly does Jesus have in mind?

To know what Jesus has in mind, I think that we need to remember or look back earlier in John's Gospel to chapter 6, verse 29. You're welcome to turn there now if you wish. Just turn back a few pages.

Jesus is asked a question by those who've been teaching about the bread of heaven. And this question is raised to him, then what must we do to be doing the works of God?

So there it is, the works of God. Okay? That's a good question. I hope all of us are asking that question on a regular basis. What are the works of God that God actually has for us? The interesting thing is that Jesus doesn't directly answer their question.

[5 : 47] He doesn't give the people their work. This is what you're supposed to do. Instead, he gives them what God's work is. And so Jesus answers, This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.

We do have a work to do. But I think what Jesus is saying here is that these signs are secondary. Not that they're not important. They are important. But God will do what only God can do, so that we will believe.

And notice that God's work comes before our work. God's work is primary. It's essential. It's what's absolutely critical. It comes first.

And it's this work of God, as he works his grace, and only by grace into our life that we believe. And so the miracle Jesus is about to perform is the work of God.

But it's not the bigger work of God. The bigger work of God is for man to believe, women to believe in the one whom God has sent.

[6 : 52] And for all to believe in the one whom God has sent. Jesus reinforces this point. By the way, he gives this man sight. Now Jesus could, he could give the man sight just by a word alone.

He did that on another occasion. On that occasion, you might remember this, there was a blind beggar as well, right? Jesus was actually on the way into Jerusalem on that occasion.

On this occasion, he's on the way out of Jerusalem. In that occasion, the man had a name, unlike this one. Well, he did, but we don't know it. But in that case, the man's name was Bartimaeus. Bartimaeus. And the disciples dismissed Bartimaeus in that case as well.

But Bartimaeus cries out, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus gave the man his sight by a word. Well, Jesus treats the anonymous blind man differently in this case.

He says, spitting, making, molding, commanding, then go, wash. Where does he, where does he send him? You notice that?

[7 : 57] He sends him to the pool of Siloam. We're told that this means scent. It's the scent pool. Scent meaning sending, not scent meaning smelling. Sorry, not to confuse you.

The pool is associated with the scent one, the work of God, which is that we believe in, in Jesus' description, the one who is sent.

So the blindness of both men, Bartimaeus and this one, is purposeful. No matter what the cause, the Lord uses this occasion to display his work.

No matter what the condition, God will use ours and others to believe. In this man's case, Jesus gave him sight.

On other occasions, he may not. But all occasions serve this purpose for belief in Jesus. And that's because Jesus desires that all come to know his saving and his sustaining grace.

[9 : 00] And the Lord's grace is sufficient for all of our circumstances in life. Adversity, tragedy, suffering, if it has a purpose. It helps us when we experience pain to know God's purpose in our life.

It helps us when someone we love experiences tragedy to know the trajectory. And when strangers carry burdens, we want them to know the bigger picture. And sometimes we can see it and they can't.

And we do want them to know. Well, after Jesus takes us back to the definition of what God's work is and so that his work might be displayed, he also makes another repeat, repetition, reiteration.

He says this, following in verse 5, I am the light of the world. This is not the first time he says that. He says it also back in chapter 8, verse 12. It's just an audacious declaration when you think about it.

He's identifying himself with the I am who revealed himself to Moses at the burning bush. Jesus is saying, I am the I am.

[10 : 08] I am the light of the world. Notice what he doesn't say, though. He doesn't say this, I shed light on the world, you know, with some kind of scathing analysis to inform the ignorant.

He doesn't say, I light up the world like some kind of hero to inspire. Neither does he say, I am the light of the festival of tabernacles, like the one who steals the show to relieve people from boredom.

No, he doesn't even say, I am the light of my 12 disciples, some kind of guru to illumine them. And neither does he say, I am the light of the Jews, like some zealot to rouse up the masses.

He says, I am the light of the world, the whole world. As if giving the man his sight then, on the Sabbath, wasn't provocative enough, repeating this claim is followed by a great division and a great disorder throughout the, throughout Jerusalem and in the temple, outside the temple.

The man, almost passed by Jesus on this occasion now, and his disciples, gets passed from neighbor, to Pharisees, to parents, and back to the Pharisees again.

[11 : 23] All along the way, he's questioned, he's scrutinized, he's interrogated. Courageously though, as well as he can take it, he actually gives it back. He does that, doesn't he?

When he retorts to the Pharisees, never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.

And with that, the Pharisees have had enough. They cast out the man and he's excommunicated. And the interesting thing about the man at this point is that he doesn't even believe fully in Jesus at this juncture.

So let's, let's do that now. Let's turn more fully to look at this man's belief. Verse 35. I know we're skipping over a lot of material here, but, skip with me almost to the end.

Jesus gets word about the man in this verse. And he seeks and he finds the man. The work of God that was begun in this man, but it's not yet turned to belief.

[12 : 30] And so, Jesus seeks him out. Love this. We think of ourselves as seekers, don't we? Before we ever seek God, God is actually seeking us.

Remember again, back in John chapter 4 when Jesus is with the woman at the well. He says this, the hour is coming and now is when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.

For such the Father seeks to worship him. Jesus went on a quest for this man and Jesus has his own question for the man.

And by this time, of course, the man is used to questions. But the motivation of Jesus' question is in a different class altogether. It isn't doubtful. It isn't cynical.

It isn't dismissive. It's not analytical. Jesus' question simply is this, do you believe in the Son of Man? Notice this, Jesus doesn't ask about his sight.

[13 : 33] He doesn't ask about being cast out. He just asks, do you believe in the Son of Man? But neither does he ask this question. He doesn't ask, do you believe? Stop.

Because everyone believes. Everyone may not believe in God, but everyone gives ultimate significance to something or someone. They believe. They trust in that.

I was given a book once called Have a Little Faith. Jesus isn't saying to this man, just have a little faith. He asks the question, do you believe in the Son of Man?

There's two things I want to point out about this question. And the first one is this. And that is, this question is very personal. Jesus gets personal with this man.

He doesn't send someone off to ask this question. And that's because the journey for this man is very personal. And few of us know what it would be like for this man, right? To be born blind and then receive his sight and then go through what he did after that.

[14 : 34] I imagine that one day he probably thought, oh, it would be great to have my sight. Never would he imagine that it would have resulted in something like this. I was impacted by the personal nature of this journey to a certain degree this past week.

I led a Bible study on this on Wednesday within four hours of one another. The first time it was with our staff, all of who we're seeing. The second time it actually was at an assisted living residence. And there was one person in the group who didn't have sight.

Not from birth, but nevertheless. And I couldn't help but come away from that wondering really, what is it like to try to trust and believe and have faith and surrender and submit?

Would it be easier if you were blind or harder if you were blind? I don't know. But the man formerly blind progressed in his belief.

You can see that. I love that word progress. It makes me think of the camp this summer. The children's Bible camp. And also Bunyan's work, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, which served as a bit of a correction to industrial, social, and moral, and military progress.

[15 : 45] There's only one kind of progress that really matters, I think. And that's the progress in faith and belief in Jesus Christ as pilgrims. Well, the blind beggar grows in his knowledge of Jesus.

Look at where he starts and then where he finishes. He's a pilgrim to this big gathering in Jerusalem. And he figured to benefit from the benevolence of those who were there like him.

But instead, he received this grace that goes way beyond, way beyond any kind of imagining that he could from Jesus. Just listen to the progress over the course of these 41 verses.

The progress that he has in knowledge and in belief and in faith. In verse 11, he's asked about this man and this is what he says, that he's the man called Jesus.

That's all. Verse 17, a little bit longer, he's asked about what he thinks of this man, who do you think this man is, and he says he is a prophet. So he's moving.

[16 : 51] Verse 22, the Pharisees are paranoid knowing what this man is doing, seeing some progress, and they say this, they're really concerned that he might confess Jesus to be the Christ.

He looks like he just might do that. And then in verse 24, he's continually asked again about what happened to him, who did this, and he says this about Jesus, whether he's a sinner, I do not know, but this I know, I was once blind and now I see.

So there's some progress moving along. And in verse 27, he kind of retorts back to the Pharisees again. I love this. You laugh when you read it in the context of the story, and he says to the Pharisees, do you also want to become one of his disciples?

Didn't you love that? What kind of courage that was coming from this man. And one wonders if he says that because he knows there were other disciples and maybe they wanted to too.

Maybe it was theoretical that he knows what the definition of a disciple is or maybe actually he was seeing himself as becoming a disciple of Jesus too. Why don't you come along with me and follow Jesus?

[18 : 01] And finally though, in 38, he says, Lord, I believe. This is encouraging, don't you think, from the perspective of evangelism and discipleship.

It suggests that both are dynamic and not a kind of static process. Jesus, I just love this, utters, I'm sorry, Jesus has utter confidence in the display of God's work that's started in this man.

And so he doesn't need to lead him to the pool and he doesn't need to protect him from the interrogation. It's almost as if his relating to everyone and their disbelief and their doubts and not even being backed fully by his parents seem to work to increase the progress of faith and belief in Jesus.

Do you find it the same way? And when your faith is challenged, there are people that doubt it, those who are unbelievers or maybe even people who are inquiring and just can't grasp it.

Do you find that your faith is just sharpened just a little bit by that or maybe a lot? Not the hypothetical questions, you know, that you might sit there in bed at night and think about or somewhere else when you're traveling.

[19 : 17] Not the theoretical ones but the ones that people really ask you. It seems like our belief is sharpened in those moments. And so receiving a sight alone doesn't cause this man to believe.

It seems that the cause for belief came when the Lord then came to him and asked him, Do you believe in the Son of Man? Notice that the man doesn't answer the question straight away.

Jesus framed it for an either yes or no answer. But Jesus draws this great question out of the man and we see the question of Jesus is not only personal, right, the man has to answer but this question is also a vital one.

And it's vital because Jesus is asking him to believe, not open-ended, but in the Son of Man. And so the man knows the vitality of this question.

How much is actually at stake? And the man's response reveals his familiarity, I think, with the term Son of Man. And he follows up with a question but not one that we might think. He asks, Who is he? I thought that he might ask or you might even ask, No, not who is he?

[20 : 28] Son of Man? What is he? What is the Son of Man? But he knows who the Son of Man is. Maybe he knows that it's God's favorite way to address Ezekiel just like you do in that book where the Son of Man is making declarations, where the Son of Man is supposed to also be sinless.

But he also knows that maybe the Son of Man, God's famous figure in Daniel when he says this, I saw in the night vision and behold with the clouds of heaven there came one like a Son of Man.

And he came to the Ancient of Days and was prepared, sorry, was presented before them. This man's familiar with the term Son of Man. This one who's going to come and rescue and deliver and save and perform signs and signs only a sinless Savior can perform.

Well, the man has some knowledge of this Son of Man term and now he's had an encounter with the Son of Man. And the encounter coupled with a question causes him to believe and do you see what it says?

And worship. He worshiped him. That's what he confesses. That's what he commits himself to. And I think the point is that Jesus is looking for belief but he's looking for more, something that it leads to and in this case, worship.

[21 : 48] I think that because look at chapter 7 back at the beginning when the whole feast of booths is about to begin and Jesus' brothers try to coax him to go up to the feast because if he wants to have followers he needs to make a show of it.

He needs to show them what he can do, perform miracles. Right? The thing that's really troubling and disturbing about that is they believe that Jesus can do these things but they don't actually believe in him.

That's disturbing. And in chapter 8 verse 31 our passage from last week it starts out that the Jews had believed in him and then later on Jesus goes on to say well father Abraham may be your father but actually your father is the devil.

well this man believes in Jesus and he worships when Jesus says you have seen him and it is he who is speaking to you.

Jesus' question is vital. It's vital because then it causes division and separation. Jesus says his purpose in verse 39 is for coming into the world for judgment.

[23 : 04] He didn't come to condemn the world but he came to judge it and where there is no judgment we can't see or know the grace of God. And so in this reading today the sign works to confront and to confound even to convict those who don't believe.

And it's dangerous since who wouldn't love to see a miracle like this? And the effect of the sign is that some discover they are worse off than they were before the miracle.

Look at verse 40. The Pharisees overhear Jesus' conversation with the man and they say are we also blind? And Jesus doesn't come right out and say yes does he?

But he says see for yourself according to this principle. If you were blind you would have no guilt. But now that you say we see your guilt remains. J.B. Phillips I think is helpful in this as well.

He says if you were blind nobody else could blame you. But as you insist we can see in other words we get it we know we believe your guilt remains.

[24 : 11] Jesus' point is the proud who assert they see who they really get it who they kind of know it all right? Rely on their own work and not the work of God. When I hear that it almost makes me wish that I were blind.

I know I really don't mean that I don't want to minimize people who have never had sight or losing their sight or have lost it. Have you ever heard of the hymn writer Fanny Crosby?

She's a writer of over 8,000 hymns and died in 1915. Probably hasn't written as many hymns as Isaac Watts or I don't know if she rivals Charles Wesley. But here's what she said when a minister came to her and posed this comment.

I think it is a great pity that the master Fanny didn't give you sight when he showered so many other gifts upon you. And she replied quickly Do you know that if at birth I had been able to make one petition it would have been that I should have been born blind.

Why? asked the minister surprise because when I get to heaven the first face that shall ever gladden my sight will be that of my savior.

[25 : 20] However it is possible to have sight and see God. But only when we come with humility and as Jesus preached in the Beatitudes the pure in heart will see God after we admit our poverty of spirit.

Let me close with two implications here. One is a pastoral one and the other one is an evangelistic one.

I know that many of us are experiencing difficulty, adversity, suffering in our life and sometimes those adversities in our life seem to compete with our belief.

It's so hard to believe when we're facing those kinds of circumstances, aren't we? Sometimes we say you know at least we have the diagnosis and then we can go on but some people don't actually get diagnosis and then it's hard to kind of move on and continue to probe the depths, allow Jesus to come to us and work that belief in us.

Let me just kind of encourage you for those of us, all of us who experience that and will experience that and continue to until the day that we die because the promise of perfect health isn't actually until we see our Lord face to face.

[26 : 36] But let me encourage you just allow Jesus to come to you as he promises here because he's the one who seeks us, seeks us that we might believe, seeks us that we might continue to worship him according to the grace that he gives us so that we can do that.

And then secondly, the other point is just evangelistically there are people in the world in which we live in that we are in relationship with, they too suffer adversity, difficulty, despair, diagnoses, lack of diagnoses, a whole range of things at the time as well.

But we too can go to them and not ask them the question that Jesus actually asked them straight away, do you believe in the son of man? That requires some relationship, doesn't it? But also ask them, you know, what kind of impact does your faith have on how you're progressing through your circumstances, your conditions?

And then maybe at some point we can ask them, do you believe in the son of man? Or maybe even describe for them how the son of man has met you in your circumstances of life, your conditions, your difficulties.

So we can then share with them that Jesus is the light of the world. He is the living water. He is the one who is seeking us all the time, long before we ever seek him.

[27 : 57] And seeks us so that we might believe and worship him and him alone, the son of man. I speak to you in the name of the father and the son and the holy spirit.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.