

John 9:13-41 “Spiritual Sight”

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Preacher: Will Spink

[0 : 01] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us. Last week we read the account of Jesus healing a blind man as Pastor Derek helped us see Jesus entering into real world suffering and showing us that nothing in our story is wasted.

Jesus heals this specific blind man in a unique way and on a particular day that creates controversy in the rest of John chapter 9 which we're looking at this morning.

He does this because Jesus wants to teach us something about spiritual blindness and spiritual sight.

Before we work our way through that story let's read the end of it. One of the best ways to understand the main points of biblical narratives is often to look at the end, the climax of the story or sometimes there's a summary at the end of a primary point from the author or in this case it's from Jesus himself.

So let's start reading at verse 39 after the climax where the formerly blind man believes in Jesus and falls at his feet in worship Jesus summarizes what he's showing us.

[1 : 34] Jesus said for judgment I came into this world that those who do not see may see and those who see may become blind. Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things and said to him are we also blind? Jesus said to them if you were blind you would have no guilt but now that you say we see your guilt remains. Jesus came he says to cause this great reversal that the blind see and the seeing become blind. He's shown us that physically right as he heals this blind man. Now he is teaching us this about spiritual sight. Spiritual sight comes when we see our own blindness and then see Jesus.

Jesus. This week during spring break my family went up to Kentucky and then we went down underground to a dark cavern.

It was very very dark. I wish that I could create how dark it was in here so you could experience it but the windows are too great. Maybe you've been in an underground cavern where you can't see your hand right in front of your face.

You know what that's like? And it's just completely pitch black dark and that's what it was like. It was so dark there were lots of rocks around lots of cliffs places you could trip and fall.

We had to walk a very long way through this underground cavern so they gave each of us these very handy headlamps. Have you ever had one of these before? You turn it on and you can't even tell if it's on right now.

[3 : 32] It's so bright in here but you turn your headlamp on and so every time you walk through the cavern you're able to see where you're going and not end up falling into great injury.

As I was wearing this I thought about what it would be like to try to find my way through that cavern with the light off. How crazy I would be to think yeah I can do this. I'm not going to get hurt. I'll never fall in total darkness.

I would have been hurt very quickly if I tried to pretend that I could do it on my own without the light. Sight came and life and safety when I admitted that I couldn't find my way around in the dark on my own and clicked on the light.

Now again that's pretty easy to understand physically right? That's obvious. Just as Jesus has given us physical sight to this man born blind we can understand that.

But in these conversations Jesus is showing us that we are all spiritually blind and maybe that's a bit harder for most of us to see.

[4 : 53] To admit that I don't understand everything about God. I even doubt sometimes. To realize that most naturally and many days I live for myself.

For my glory. That's not spiritual sight. To confess these kinds of struggles and in that moment finally see.

We're going to let the story itself be our outline today but I'll give you a couple of questions to ponder as we go. Do I really see my own spiritual blindness?

If so how? What does that look like? Do I see him for who he truly is?

Consider those questions as we read this story. It starts in verse 13. They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind.

[6 : 07] Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them he put mud on my eyes and I washed and I see.

So some of the Pharisees said this man is not from God for he does not keep the Sabbath. You hear what's happening right? Immediately the religious leaders, the experts, they're looking for reasons to discredit Jesus.

It appears that Jesus has violated, likely on purpose, one of their man-made Sabbath regulations. Either about mixing clay for pottery possibly or anointing eyes or healing on the Sabbath when it's not life or death.

And so many of the experts see an open and shut case. He broke God's law. He's not from God. But at least a couple Pharisees are saying, hold on, it's not that easy, y'all.

It's not that simple. We can't just dismiss him like that. How are we going to explain the miraculous signs that Jesus keeps doing? He's displaying this power.

[7 : 20] Look, verse 16. But others said, how can a man who is a sinner do such signs? And there was a division among them.

What to do? Maybe they think, let's get the one eyewitness, so to speak. Let's see if we can get him on our side.

If the formerly blind man says, Jesus is a fraud, is a charlatan, we'll be set. So they said again to the blind man, what do you say about him since he has opened your eyes?

And he said, he is a prophet. Now that would be the obvious answer, wouldn't it? To have power like this.

This is what prophets did when God sent prophets. He sent them with this power to bring signs that validate their message. They could just all agree that this guy is clearly from God.

[8 : 23] But the religious leaders want another answer. They want to be the ones who know better. Who decide what is from God based on their wisdom.

Maybe there hasn't even been a miracle at all. All of this can be explained scientifically. Maybe there's nothing special going on here. Verse 18, the Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, is this your son who you say was born blind?

How then does he now see? And his parents answered, we know that this is our son and that he was born blind, but how he sees, we do not know.

Nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him, he is of age. He'll speak for himself. His parents said these things because they feared the Jews. For the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be the Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.

Therefore his parents said, he is of age. Ask him. The parents don't help at all, do they? They affirm that something miraculous has indeed occurred and everyone hears their affirmation.

[9 : 43] Of course, they stop short of saying much about this Jesus, don't they? Because the experts have already made it clear that those who follow him will not be welcome in this society.

And they wriggle out of that part an understandable concern, given how devastating it would be to be left out of the synagogue and the communal society of that day.

So what do the religious leaders do? They go back to the first witness, to the formerly blind man. They're going to tighten the screws and get the answer they need to stay in control of things.

So this time they just tell him the right answer. Okay. Verse 24. So for the second time, they called the man who had been blind and said to him, give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner.

And he answered, whether he's a sinner, I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.

[10 : 44] There's that beloved line. What a beautiful testimony. Here's what I know. Once I was blind, now I see.

He doesn't give a theological treatise on the person of Jesus. He doesn't explain to them how he is fully God and fully man at the same time. He doesn't even defend Jesus' Sabbath observance and tell them how it was okay for Jesus to heal him on a Saturday.

But he gladly shares what Jesus has done to transform his life. I hope all of us who have had Jesus show up in our darkness, in our suffering, and give us light and life.

I hope all of us have the joy of testifying to that reality. You know you don't have to go to seminary in order to do that. You're aware of that, right? You can share your story of God's grace in your life all the time.

We love sharing stories of God's grace here at Southwood. Come let us know. We'll figure out the best way to share yours. But it may be that that's going to be at work or with a neighbor.

[11 : 59] And the joy of sharing your personal story, even if it costs you. And let's be clear, this man is facing the same serious consequences that just frightened his parents, right?

Even if it costs you, the joy is worth it, isn't it? To share of who Jesus is and what he's done for you. Well, then this guy starts getting a bit testy.

The formerly blind man has an attitude. Listen. Listen. They said to him, what did he do to you? How did he open your eyes? And he answered them, I have told you already and you would not listen.

Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples? Ouch. They don't like that very much. They didn't find that funny. You chuckled.

They did not chuckle. And they reviled him, saying, you are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses.

[13 : 02] We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we don't know where he comes from. And the man answered, why, this is an amazing thing.

You do not know where he 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 born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.

And they answered him, you were born in utter sin. And would you teach us? And they cast him out. Wow. This man has been blind his whole life.

But he sees clearly, doesn't he? He's connecting some obvious dots. His spiritual vision is becoming 20-20.

[14 : 05] What he's saying is it requires unprecedented power to give sight to a blind man, right? We can agree with that. That power would have to come from God.

Anyone with that power then is clearly from God, for God, not against God. And Jesus has demonstrated that power in his life. The clear conclusion is what?

Jesus is from God. But even faced with that clear conclusion, the experts reject Jesus.

And this man born in sin who would dare to teach the teachers. Don't correct the experts. What's their rallying cry here?

What do we hear them saying? We know, verse 24. We know, verse 29. The religious leaders are convinced that they see spiritually.

[15 : 10] So any suggestion that they might have a blind spot must be rejected. Any teaching, any teacher that contradicts their authority or that tweaks their pride must be cast out.

We know God has spoken to Moses. They got that one right, didn't they? Also, we know that Jesus is a sinner. One out of two.

We're disciples of Moses. We keep the law, right? Reminds me of the parable Jesus told in Luke chapter 18 of two men that come into the temple to pray.

The first one is a Pharisee. And he stands and prays proudly of all the wonderful religious things he has done. Obeying. Tithing.

Fasting. And then in the far corner of the temple is the tax collector. With his head down. Can't even look up to God.

[16 : 18] Beating his chest. Cries out what? God have mercy on me. A sinner. And Jesus explains that that second humble way is actually the appropriate way to relate to God.

Not the prideful performance way. But these experts are disciples of Moses. And just like the Pharisee in the parable, their knowledge and their pride are getting in the way of their spiritual sight.

Don't answer these questions out loud. But think honestly how you would answer them. If you were asked this with no context whatsoever.

Do you need help? With my finances? With my homework? What do you mean?

With managing life? Many of us are used to answering no to that question, aren't we? I'm not the one who needs help.

[17 : 38] How about, do you need to be rescued? Not usually. I'm sure there's somebody out there somewhere who does. And there's probably a good search and rescue team to go get them.

But not me. Let me use a spiritual word to give you a little bit more context. Do you need to be disciplined?

Well, you may say, I mostly disciple others. Well, I mean, I'm no Mother Teresa or Billy Graham. But I've been around church a long time.

I mean, my kids might need some of that. That'd be good. Be honest. Many of us feel like pretty good people much of the time in most of the contexts we live in.

And that can be a challenge. There's an extra challenge for those of us who have that experience to spiritual sight. If you are often successful in different areas of life, and therefore you're unfamiliar or uncomfortable being the one in need of help, of rescue, of discipling.

[19 : 01] It's extra hard. I've told you before of a middle school activity where all of us students were blindfolded and led out into a forest and put our hands on a rope.

And these ropes had been tied so that they were tied around trees in a continuous loop. So you would just follow the rope around and around. But they didn't tell us that. They told us that if you followed the rope to the very end, you would win and get the prize.

And so what happened was we blindfolded, started following the rope. They said if we needed any help, just raise our hand. When a child raised his hand, the whole point of the game was that a leader would come, pull that child aside, take off his blindfold, give them the prize and congratulate them.

The whole point of the game was to admit that you needed help. Now, which kinds of students do you think were the ones left blind last, stuck in the circle of trees?

Many of them were the very top students, used to figuring out the puzzles. Competitive ones like me who knew if we just tried hard enough, we would win and we were going to figure it out, man.

[20 : 19] Whew, it's been a long afternoon holding that rope. We didn't do well at the physical sight game that was won by admitting your need.

How do we do at the spiritual sight that Jesus says begins by admitting that you don't see? By seeing your need.

What keeps you from seeing your own spiritual blindness? Keep thinking about that, but now we reach the climax of the story and it is absolutely glorious.

Verse 35. The religious leaders have cast the man out, right? Verse 35.

Jesus heard that they had cast him out and having found him, he said... I want to stop here before we read the rest of what Jesus says to him and say something to those of you who have been hurt by religious leaders.

[21 : 34] These days we often call it experiencing church hurt. And I know that's a lot of you. Increasingly common these days to have experienced that.

What I want to say to you is this. Jesus came for you. To find you. To heal you.

To help you see. And see him. Look at this verse again. If you blink, you'll miss how fast Jesus moves to you.

Jesus heard that they had cast this man out. And having found him, bam! Just like that. Man, having found him.

Doesn't even tell us about Jesus looking for him, does it? As soon as he hears, bam, having found him. They want him out. Jesus wants him in.

[22 : 37] Don't you doubt that one more day. One more minute. That's how Jesus feels about you. I don't know your particular situation.

I'm not telling you that you were right and the church was wrong. That's not the point. If you have wounds from the church, Jesus wants to heal them. He does. He's coming to you to do that.

He doesn't want anything that you've experienced at the hands of those who represent him. To keep you distant from him. He is drawing near to you.

Even now. Even through his word. Even if you can believe it as hard as it is for your heart to receive. At church.

He's drawing near to you. Come. I'd love to talk with you about that. Let's pray to him together. I can listen to you.

[23 : 34] And I can do that. I can run to him with you. Even if I'm part of the hurt for you. Please know. Jesus' heart for you.

Jesus makes sure. That the formerly blind man. Sees him clearly. He doesn't want anything that anybody else has done. To confuse him. About who Jesus really is.

Having found him. He said. Do you believe in the son of man? And he answered. And who is he, sir? That I may believe in him.

Jesus said to him. You have seen him. And it is he. Who is speaking to you. Do you hear what Jesus is saying? So.

Gently. Gently. Gently and helpfully together. At the same time. Jesus is saying.

[24 : 33] Do the man in this way. Here's what's happened to you. And here's who I am. You. You don't have all the answers. I get it. I know that about you.

You don't even understand fully. The question. That I'm asking you. Who the son of man is. Listen. The son of man. Gave you. Your sight.

You have. Seen. Him. And narrows down the list for this man. Doesn't it? You have seen him. And. And. It is he. Who is speaking to you.

Not only did you have one encounter. Where with open eyes you've seen him. He has tracked you down again. To rescue you. Physical sight that you'd never known.

And now spiritual sight. That you'd never known. Until Jesus entered your life. And he said Lord.

[25 : 28] I believe. And he worshipped him. What a glorious resolution. I love this so much. This man who has just been kicked out of the synagogue.

Has found a wonderful place to worship. Hasn't he? At the feet of Jesus. See this is how glorious Jesus is. That our spiritual progress.

Is all about our view of Jesus. Not our improved performance. What those who are spiritually blind need. Is not a tweaked prescription for our glasses.

It won't help. It's a clear vision of Jesus. An entirely different focus on him. Not on me. Our faith grows. As who Jesus is.

And what he's done. Comes into focus for us. Watch how it happens through this story with the man. All the way back in verse 11. It's a bit fuzzy for him. The guy who healed me.

[26 : 25] I don't know. The man called Jesus. Verse 17. He's a prophet. In verse 33.

He pronounces Jesus a man from God. He recognizes that. And by verse 38. Where is he? Face to face with the Savior. Helped by Jesus' passionate pursuit.

Patient explanation. The healed man is worshiping Jesus as Lord. Spiritual sight. This is what it's all about.

Having seen his blindness. He now sees Jesus. Do you truly see Jesus?

Jesus. I didn't ask if you've been to church before. I asked do you see him as clearly as the formerly blind man sees him.

[27 : 25] Spiritual sight like that starts with seeing your own blindness and need. Have you ever had a moment like that? A moment when you realize that you weren't okay on your own.

That you didn't have life figured out. And all the answers to how everything should go. That you didn't measure up. Even to your own standards. If you had that reality check come in.

Much less to a standard of perfection. If you've had one of those moments. The reality is it's even worse than you realized in that moment. Your need is even greater than you understand.

Your spiritual need is so great that the perfect son of God had to die on a cross for you. But see he did that.

Because the heart of God displayed perfectly in Jesus is drawn to need. Just as he rushed to find the man who was cast out.

[28 : 27] Jesus is near the broken hearted immediately. His grace is like water running downhill to the low point to fill the hole. He's like the doctor with the great cure who is eager and excited to find those with a disease.

He's drawn to those who are sick so that he can cure them. Jesus is the light of the world drawn to the darkness so that he can shine brightly in.

Just here Jesus shows us the essential condition for spiritual sight. Is that you know you can't see on your own.

That you realize you're in darkness. And it is bad news unless the light shines in for you to live.

What does it mean for you to truly see Jesus? Roy and Revel Heschen describe it so well in this tiny book called *We Would See Jesus*.

[29 : 35] Yes, you should read it. It's short. To see Jesus is to apprehend him as the supply of our present needs and believingly to lay hold on him as such.

The Lord Jesus is always seen through the eye of need. He is presented to us in the scriptures not for our academic contemplation and delight.

But for our desperate need as sinners and weaklings. The acknowledgement of need and the confession of sin therefore is always the first step in seeing Jesus.

And then when that happens, when we start seeing him, where there is acknowledged need, the Holy Spirit delights to show to the heart the Lord Jesus as the supply of just that need.

Oh, Jesus, I need your grace. Right? And forgiveness for all of my sins. You are the merciful Savior.

[30 : 42] Savior. I need your patience. I need your patience when I fail again. And you, Jesus, you're the tender, everlasting Father.

I need your strength, Jesus, in my weakness. You are the mighty God. I need your wisdom in all my foolishness and confusion.

And you are the wonderful counselor. I need your guidance, your direction of me because I get lost and confused. And you are the good shepherd, Jesus.

I get anxious. You're very present with me, Jesus. I need when I'm afraid, when I'm anxious. I need to know you're there and you're the Prince of Peace who comforts me. Your light, light of the world, gives life in my darkest moments.

Friends, there are so many reminders of our need, aren't there? That are yet so many more glorious reminders of Jesus' sufficient grace.

[31 : 47] Amen? That's what our sin and our need is. It's to turn our eyes to him again so that he's that much more precious to us.

That we're that much more desperate for him. And he becomes that much more beautiful in our eyes. And we say, Jesus, it's you that I need. Straight to you.

I can go straight to you. And I see. I finally see. Someone said to me not long ago, Pastor, I think I know why you get so worked up, so passionate.

It makes me a little uncomfortable sometimes when you talk about the gospel. It's not just because you want all of us to be so passionate when we tell our friends and neighbors about Jesus.

It is. But you really believe there are some of us in that sanctuary every week who don't really know Jesus. I said, you're absolutely right.

[32 : 48] I don't want anyone to think that they see Jesus but never really see him.

To miss how desperately they need him and how completely he meets their needs. Yes, I'm passionate for that.

And I'm also passionate because I'm also convinced every one of us in here needs to see Jesus as much and as desperately as those who have never, ever seen him before.

That my having spiritual life this week, that my knowing this afternoon how to experience life is dependent on my truly seeing Jesus again for who he is.

Not my thinking, now I know enough. Finally, I've got it together. I can trust my spiritual instincts. No.

[33 : 52] No. Who are you again, Jesus? Who are you? Remind me again. Tell me again how you'll pick me up if I fail. Tell me again how you'll meet me and embrace me even if everybody else rejects me.

Tell me again how you'll give me life that I can never lose and that never ends. Tell me again, Jesus, who you are for that. And Jesus says, I am the light of the world.

I have shined into this world. I have shined into this world so that even today, even here, those who realize they do not see may see.

So that those who have walked in darkness may have the light of life forever. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.