

Encounters With Jesus(8) A Man Born Blind - "Now I See!"

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[0 : 00] We're going to look at some of the main aspects of this passage and of this event that's recorded in it where Jesus healed this man from his blindness, restored his sight because he had never had sight.

He was born blind and was blind until Jesus restored his sight as we've read. We can just read perhaps just at verse 24.

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. He answered whether he is a sinner I do not know.

One thing I do know that though I was blind now I see. And as you know these words were imported by John Newton into his famous hymn Amazing Grace.

I once was lost but now I'm found. Was blind but now I see. And as we've said already at different times the Gospel of John is largely comprised of statements or lengthy expositions by Jesus of his ministry accompanied by miracles that John in his Gospel calls signs.

[1 : 16] And so you find that the signs and the explanatory or accompanying discourses or speeches of Jesus are actually very closely tied together.

For example as you know in John 11 you find Jesus saying of himself I am the resurrection and the life. And that's accompanied as a demonstration of that if you like by the way that he brought Lazarus back from the grave and restored him to life.

And you find something similar happening in these chapters as well. In fact you need to go back to chapter 8 and at verse 12 to find the beginning of this run of teaching through into chapter 9.

Because there at verse 12 chapter 8 again Jesus spoke to them saying I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.

And you carry that with you into chapter 9 where Jesus again is saying as long as he is in the world he is the light of the world. And where that is again accompanied by a demonstration of this in restoring the sight of this man who was born blind.

[2 : 30] In other words that miracle of restoring the sight of the man who was born blind is itself a demonstration of the truth of Christ's claim to be the light of the world.

The one who gives insight. The one who opens eyes spiritually. That's really where you find those two things coming together. The statement alongside of the miracle or of the sign.

In other words the darkness that's spoken of in these verses like in chapter 6 chapter 8 rather than verse 12 there I am the light of the world.

On into chapter 9 where you find that is obviously a spiritual thing or a moral thing or both moral and spiritual often combined together. He's talking here about moral spiritual darkness from which Jesus alone is able to redeem us or able to release us.

He gives sight to the blind. He deals with our spiritual darkness. He deals with what we are born with in terms of our moral and spiritual condition.

[3 : 37] And it's that that Jesus came to deal with in his salvation and his redemption as the Savior. That's where you find these words of course built into the hymn as we mentioned by John Newton.

I once was lost but now I am found. I was blind but now I see. Very rightly Newton saw these words in John 9 as primarily to do with redemption.

With spiritual sight being restored to those who are born spiritually blind as all of us are. And so there are three things I want to mention just from the passage as a whole.

First of all verses 1 to 5 you find a focus on this man's special needs. You find a focus on this man's special need which of course is his blindness.

And then in verses 6 to 11 we'll look briefly at how Jesus restored this man's sight. And then from verse 12 onwards to the rest of the chapter it really deals essentially with the man's progress in faith.

[4 : 42] How the man's faith developed to the point in verse 38 where you come to see him really there at the feet of Jesus. And calling him Lord and saying that he believes and he worshipped him.

So you see there's a development there from his first encounter with Jesus right through until the time that you find him as a worshipper of Jesus. And that's really essentially why we're looking at these encounters with Jesus anyway.

So that you yourself and myself will come to know of that progress of that happening in our own lives. Our encounter with Jesus is not just an encounter that brings something about and then that's it.

It's something that establishes us in the way of discipleship, in the way of producing in us that saving knowledge as we usually refer to it of Christ himself.

Which then grows as other aspects of our experience of Jesus grows right through including our worship of him. So firstly the focus on the man's special need.

[5 : 51] As he passed by he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, Rabbi who sinned this man or his parents that he was born blind?

Jesus answered, it was not that this man sinned or his parents but that the works of God might be displayed in him. So on. You see there's a reference there immediately to the disciples having a misunderstanding of this man's condition and how it had come about.

His disciples asked him, Rabbi who sinned this man or his parents. This was not the world asking. This was people, these were people who were disciples. They're called disciples of Jesus.

And they've got it wrong. They've looked at this man outwardly. They've seen that he's blind. And they're asking this question.

How is it that he was born blind? Was it his sin that caused it? Or was it his parents? It had to be one or the other as far as they were concerned. And Jesus is saying it's not to do with that.

[6 : 54] It's not that he or his parents sinned. But that the works of God might be displayed in him. Very similarly to what he said earlier in Luke's, earlier in John's Gospel.

The woman of Samaria is a means of showing forth the way in which Jesus deals with a person, whatever their background. And establishes them in a proper relationship with God.

And here we are reminded of the importance of not bringing our own value judgments to bear upon people that we meet with.

We are reminded constantly in the Bible of the danger of assessing people just simply outwardly from what you see in their lives from day to day.

Or perhaps what you actually might hear them say. You come to somebody who might really be so troubled in mind that they're not able to tell people about how they feel.

[7 : 58] And the way that they actually react to you perhaps is something you wouldn't expect or you wouldn't want. Or maybe you think it's very inappropriate. But let's always remember that things are going on in people's lives that sometimes we know nothing about.

And that that will explain why it is they act as they do. Why it is they seem to act improperly as far as our estimation is concerned.

So often we bring our own value judgments to bear upon the person before we really get to know their situations and we mustn't do that. And another thing it reminds us too doesn't it that we are to give a place in every way equal to others in God's church to those who have special needs.

One of the great things seeing in any congregation is that people who have special needs, whatever it is, they are limited in terms of their ability compared to others.

Whether it's physical or mental. Or people who have mental health issues. Whether they have physical disabilities. Whatever we might use to describe them. Their place is in God's church like anybody else.

[9 : 09] And we must give them that place as much as we give to anybody else. However much they may differ from us. And you know this is something that constantly we need to remind ourselves of.

Sometimes we might feel a little bit annoyed in a sense with health and safety issues. And with ensuring that our passages, our church passages are wide enough and free of clutter and entrances and so on.

But there's a reason for that. There's a good reason for that. It's that those who have special needs will feel that they are as much a part of this congregation or any congregation as anybody else.

That they're not made to feel any more vulnerable than they already are. And that we assure them that they are as welcome to be part of God's worshipping people as anybody else.

That's just in passing but it's important. You remember how Jesus, just to finish that point, in Luke's Gospel in chapter 14. You meet with the account that Jesus gives of the great banquet as it's usually called.

[10 : 19] Where the invitation was given and many refused. They made excuses. They'd done this. They'd done that. So they couldn't come. They couldn't respond. So the servant came and reported these things to the master.

Then the master of the house said, Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city. Bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame. Jesus specifically mentioned them as having a part in the kingdom of God as much as anybody else.

And that's why they are valuable. However much they're unlike the majority, they are still as much welcome in God's sight as anyone else.

And you know, it's really quite, well, it's quite humbling and quite exhilarating at the same time. When sometimes you go to speak at meetings, such as the Lewis Castle SU, where there are people with special needs.

And the delight they have in singing praise to God. The delight they have in listening to a short message from the Bible. The value they place on the Bible itself. In a way it's quite remarkable.

[11 : 32] And yet it shouldn't surprise us. Because out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, God has perfected praise. They are special to us.

They mean a lot to us. They have their place. Their rightful place. In the kingdom of God. And you notice too, there's a note of urgency in this part of the chapter.

Because Jesus immediately went on to say, We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

You see the note of urgency there. It's repeated elsewhere as well by Christ and elsewhere in the Bible. The urgency with which Jesus addresses us of our need of himself.

Of our need for our eyes spiritually to be opened. And a reception given to him as the only one who can save us from our sins. Imagine being in a situation where there was no artificial light.

[12 : 36] Where you had to do things while the natural daylight existed. And where you had no access to natural light of any kind. Perhaps a little candle light or whatever.

But what you were doing outside, let's say, you had to finish it while you had daylight. Otherwise, the night was going to close in and it would be unfinished. That's the imagery that Jesus is using.

And he's using that imagery in regard to salvation. In regard to our eyes spiritually being opened. While we have Jesus before us in the gospel. As he says here to those that were physically seeing him there.

As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. Or as he says elsewhere, while you have the light, believe in the light. That you may be the children of light. In chapter 12.

And then you read that he went and hid himself from them. That was the end of his public ministry. Oh, let it not be in your experience.

[13 : 34] Let it not be your experience. That you come ultimately to face a Jesus that you have not received. That you didn't actually make the maximum use of the light that God gives you in the gospel while you had it.

Here he is saying, the night is coming. When no one can work. You know, when the night closes in on our human lives at death. What we haven't done then, we will not do afterwards.

Night is coming when no one can work. Make sure you make the most of the daylight of the gospel. The focus then on the man's sense, the man's special needs.

And how he builds into that as well. The need, the urgency with which we need to give attention to our spiritual condition. That's the first point. Second point is how Jesus restored the man's sight.

Now go to verse 6 there. Having said these things, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud and said to him, Go and wash in the pool of Siloam, which means scent.

[14 : 49] So he went and washed and came back seeing. The first important thing to note, thing of importance there, is the contact that Jesus made physically with this man.

Remember, he's blind. He's never seen anything his whole life. He was born blind. He relied on touch. He relied on people leading him and touching him in order to give him directions, in order to let him know what was happening.

And that touch is so important to Christ. Christ is conveying his love by this touch. Christ is conveying his concern for this man by his touch.

He's conveying his intention by this touch. It's so meaningful to this blind man that here is someone who has taken such an interest in him that he's now made a solution that he's applying to his eyes in order to bring a cure to his blindness.

How precious that touch was to this man. And touch is still important. Not just for people who have limited or no sight, but for every one of us.

[16 : 01] And we live in a world, sadly, where appropriate touching is something now that you're almost too frightened to engage in because there's so much in the news about inappropriate touching.

But you know, the Bible is full of references to a proper kind of loving touch. You cannot substitute a proper hug to somebody who really wants to cry on your shoulder.

You cannot substitute anything else for that that's as meaningful as that. When you're beside somebody in a hospital bed and you want to pray with them and they want you to pray with them.

When you take hold of their hand and when you hold their hand while they're praying, you can tell from the response how much that touch means to them. Touch in an appropriate way is such a meaningful part of human life.

And you feel some devastated sometimes when that is really so misused. Or the publicizing of so much that is misused, touch is misused.

[17 : 08] It really makes you cry almost to think that we're at the stage where you're afraid to show your affection in a proper genuine way with a touch that assures and reassures and conveys your love and your affection and your interest.

And we shouldn't be afraid of that in an appropriate way. And you know, that's something else that we have to bear in mind.

That especially when people have special needs and especially mental health needs, there is a meaningfulness in touch from someone else to assure them that they've not forgotten them.

That they're still precious to them. And one of the things that concerns us is when families are parted by the need to have people sent to mainland places of care, when sometimes you feel that that care ought to be here.

I remember in my younger days a woman in the village was brought up in, tongue, every single year of her life. She spent a winter in Craigdenay in Inverness to receive the care that she needed.

[18 : 24] But it meant she was separated for a whole six to eight months from her sister who lived at home. They couldn't see her for that time. That, of course, was something that was traumatic for them.

Stressful for them. Having such a distance. They weren't able to touch, to reassure, to actually be present with her. That, of course, was taken care of by local means being made available.

But we hope that that will continue. You may think that's not really appropriate for a sermon. I think it is. It's part of the love that we have to show to each other and to those who have special needs.

And seek by God's grace that provision will still be made for them. Because it's so important that there is such a thing as presence and touch for those who have those needs.

So here is the contact, first of all. And then he made clay with the spittle that he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva. And he anointed the man's eyes.

[19 : 23] Why did he do that? Why did he do such a thing? Could he not have just touched the man's eyes or said, even without touching at all, though we've said how important touch was, could he not have just said, as Jesus did on other occasions, be healed?

And he would be healed. But you see, this reminds us too of something else. That although this is very ordinary stuff, this mud and this saliva mixed together to make a kind of solution out of it, and then it's applied to the man's eyes, it reminds us that God uses particular means in order to bring about his purposes.

That God uses such things, such people as you and I ourselves, and means that are in many ways ordinary. What is more ordinary than a book or bread or a cup with wine?

They're everyday things, but they're special in their religious and spiritual significance. They are means that God himself uses to channel his grace into our hearts.

And that's why we so often give thanks to God for his wisdom, in using what is so ordinary and even ourselves, in order to further blessing for other people.

[20 : 52] So, here he comes, and the other thing is, as he does this, what you see is, Jesus is targeting the exact area of this man's need.

He makes the solution out of the mud and the spittle. He applies it to his eyes. He anointed the man's eyes with the mud and said, go and wash in the pool of Siloam. He's targeting exactly where the problem lies.

That's so precious to yourself, isn't it? You don't have a Savior. We don't have a Savior, a Jesus in the Gospel, who really doesn't know where to lay his hand upon your need, who doesn't really know exactly what your need consists of, who really has to scabble around, as we do sometimes, to really find out the truth for ourselves.

He knows it exactly. And for your life tonight, what is more precious than that this Son of God, this Savior, Jesus Christ, is able at any given moment in your life, and all the time, to put his finger on the problem in your life, and to apply the appropriate measure for your well-being.

No one else can do that for you, but he can, and he is able to do it constantly. And then, along with the contact, you have a command.

[22 : 12] You need to keep going, because there's a lot yet to go through. He gives a command, and he says to the man, Go and wash in the pool of Siloam. So he went and washed and came back seeing. That's interesting.

Jesus, of course, could have done this, and just said to him, Now, I've put the mud on your eyes, just wash it off, and that's it. You'll be seeing. But he wasn't yet seeing. And he didn't see, until he had gone and done what Jesus had commanded him.

His eyes were opened. His sight was restored, or his eyes opened, you might say, in a spiritual sense as well, by actually going to wash in this pool of Siloam.

It reminds you of Naaman, doesn't it, in 2 Kings, in chapter 5, where he came to Elisha, or a servant came to Elisha to appeal to Elisha to go and help his master, who had this problem, this leprosy, this ailment in his life.

And when Elisha came to meet him, eventually, when he met with Elisha, Elisha said to him, Go and dip yourself seven times in the Jordan, and you will be cured.

[23 : 18] And you know, you read, Naaman was furious. He was livid. And what do you read? He actually said, well, the first words he said are so important to understand his mindset, because he said, I thought that he would say to me to go and wash, or to, I thought that he would say to speak the words and it would be done, rather than go and wash in the Jordan.

And then he says, anyway, are not, are not the rivers of Damascus, Farfar and Ababa, are they not just as good as the waters of the Jordan?

And he went away, turned away furious. See, these are the key words, I thought. They're the downfall of many a soul.

I thought. But it's not about your thought, and it's not about my thought. It's not what you or I think is appropriate for us in our sense of need, in our need of Christ, in regard to our sin, in our relationship with God.

All of us are born with this innate sense of, I know my need, and I thought this would be how it would be done. And Jesus is saying, what are your thoughts compared to my thoughts?

[24 : 35] Put away your own sense of what is appropriate for your well-being. Go and wash in the pool of Siloam. And he washed, and he came back, seeing.

And it's exactly the same with the Gospel. That's why people try to make the Gospel palatable. That's why you find so often nowadays people just adjusting or changing or altering this here and there just because the Gospel itself actually causes offense.

The Gospel tells you you cannot cure your own blindness. You need to go and do things by God's method and in God's terms. That annoys us.

That really gets to our conscience and it makes us angry if we're honest with ourselves until we realize that God actually knows best. And what he's doing is really turning us, turn from your own foolishness and your darkened mind and your lack of understanding and your closed eyes and do it my way and you'll be cured and you will see.

And he came home seeing. You see, when you do things God's way it always ends up with the result that God promises.

[25 : 58] We saw this morning the same with the manna when the Gaelic service where God specified the instructions accompanying the fall of the manna. This is how you will gather it.

This is how you will deal with it. How you will cook it. This is how you will how you will actually use it. When they failed to do it God's way when they tried to follow their own best way of doing it as they thought well, it stank.

It bread warms. God was showing them well, you do it your way but that's what you'll end up with. You'll end up with a stinking mess. But if you do it my way you'll be clean and you'll have life.

Jesus restored the man's sight. Contact, a command and a change as he came home saying. And then finally the man's progress in faith.

And I'm going to deal with this fairly quickly. Verses 12 to 38. You can see the gradual progress in his understanding and in his faith. If you go to verse 12 for example first of all you can see what it says there.

[27 : 06] They said to him where is he? And he said I do not know. And then go forward to verse 17. Again they say to the blind man what do you say about him since he has opened your eyes?

He said he is a prophet. Now you see he's advanced a little bit. He's beginning to show a bit of understanding more than he had before. Then you go to verse 25. He answered whether he's a sinner I don't know but one thing I do know that though I was blind now I see.

And he gives them a wee lecture. about the view of Moses and this man as he calls him. And then you come to the climax in verses 35 to 38.

38 especially Lord I believe. And he worshipped him. So you have all of these steps and they're very deliberate on the part of John that we as we read this passage that's why we read the whole passage because without doing that you don't get these steps and you don't get this sense of increase of understanding and of coming to believe in this man.

And it brings us to this pinnacle if you like where he is there worshipping Jesus with this conviction. Lord I do believe. And he worshipped him.

[28 : 23] Spiritual growth is not something instant. The apostle Paul didn't grow spiritually to the man he was or to the Christian he was when he wrote to the Philippians.

he didn't grow instantly when he met Jesus on the road to Damascus so that he could write exactly the same thing he wrote to Philippians 20 years later. Because when he wrote to Philippians he said I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content.

He had learned it. It didn't come to him instantly. Not so it is for ourselves. We always have to be patient with people who are beginning to show an interest in Christ or who have come to know Christ.

It's not going to happen all at once although some of course will be more advanced than others more quickly. That's just how it is. But let's be patient with each other.

Let's especially be patient with those who are beginning the Christian life. Don't expect them to be advanced all at once. Don't expect them to know how to do things the way they ought to be done all at once.

[29 : 32] You have to learn. We all have to learn. As this man showed this increase. But he came to his confession finally and this is really our final point.

He came to this confession through being given a very hard time by the Pharisees. The Pharisees throughout the chapter as you find throughout John are those who look back to Moses and take pride in Moses and that's John's way of saying they are still rigidly attached to the law and to their observance of the law and to their obedience to the law as the ground of their acceptance with God.

And here is this man and all he is saying is Lord I believe. The contrast between the Pharisee and this man is really obvious isn't it?

because here he is at the feet of Jesus he is not saying well I have to now keep the law if I am going to be right with God it is the only way that I can do it I have got to become like these Pharisees.

No John is actually showing up the contrast and he is really saying Lord I believe and he worshipped him. The Pharisees are locked into the past they are bound by their own traditions around the law of God so they are spiritually blind that's a very difficult passage at the end of the chapter but it really amounts to pretty much saying that the Pharisees are willfully blind because they are willfully rejecting Jesus and so they remain blind they remain in their guilt because they will not accept him they are insistent that they know best that their ways are best and so that's why Jesus says these things at the end of the chapter but you can see verse 35 the question that he put to this man and there's a sense of relief isn't there you read through this chapter and the hassle that they are giving this man and the hard time that they are giving him the oppression that this man is experiencing from these

[31 : 45] Pharisees eventually they cast him out of the synagogue there he is on his own he's been rejected he's been excommunicated and there he is there's a relief then when you read Jesus found him Jesus heard that they had cast him out and having found him he said do you believe in the son of man some translations have the son of God but it amounts to the same thing son of man goes back to Daniel's prophecy and in Daniel's prophecy the son of man is a divine figure so Jesus is the son of man he's also the son of God both things are true of him we don't need to go into that but it's a divine title what he's saying to this man is do you believe in the son of man and of course Jesus knows he doesn't even know that this man doesn't even know who the son of man is or the son of God but what he's doing is leading him to make his confession he says who is he sir that I may believe in him

Jesus said to you and these are amazing words just think of the context a man born blind and Jesus now saying you have seen him you're now seeing him because you're able to see like you never saw before you have seen him and it is he who is speaking to you and then of course you can just sense that the dawn has broken well and truly Lord I believe in other words I believe in you and he worshipped him and Jesus of course accepted that worship of course the point is this though in the question that Jesus put to him where he says do you believe in the son of man the word you is very emphatic in the original text of that verse do you believe in the son of man in other words

Jesus you might say is really saying to him after all you've experienced after all you've said even up to now in terms of the progress you've made what you've seen what you've heard what you've already said surely you now believe you in the son of man and he's saying that to you and to me tonight as well surely you believe in him surely you of all people are in a position to believe in this Jesus after all you've heard not just tonight but throughout the course of your life after all you know of the gospel is it not true of you that you believe in the son of man to finish with something I came across I'm not sure who wrote it but it's a story I think from real life a Christian businessman just reading from the way

I found it a Christian businessman let's call him John had an employee let's call him James who sincerely wanted to be saved but stumbled at the simplicity of believing in Jesus John his employer sent him a note asking him to come to his office on a certain day and hour right on time James appeared at the office John said well James did you want to see me John said James said your notes sir and he was handing him this little note that he had been sent oh yes the note John said then you really believed that I was sincere when I sent you that of course I did replied James then you really believed that I would keep this appointment said John of course sir he replied well John said here's a very strange thing I sent you this one short note and you promptly responded with the utmost confidence and yet

Jesus Christ has given you so many invitations to go to him and accept his pardon and you will not because of unbelief oh is it like that said James light breaking in upon his mind yes just like that James go to Christ as promptly and as trustingly as you have come to me and pardon and peace will be yours that's what he did and surely that's what you and I also now will do may God bless to us these words let's pray we thank you gracious Lord for the provision of spiritual sight we thank you for your loving interest in us to cure us from our spiritual blindness we pray that you would rescue us from any sense we have of the superiority of our own thoughts of our own minds as if ours were superior to yours rescue us we pray from what we would devise for ourselves as means of our own well-being and situation and salvation grant us we pray instead to fall at your feet as this man did who said

[37 : 26] Lord I believe and grant that we too may come more and more to worship you receive our worship then Lord at this time go before us throughout this week now and pardon our many sins for Jesus sake Amen now we're going to conclude our service this evening singing in Psalm 23 Psalm 23 that's the Scottish Psalter version the Lord's my shepherd what better way to capture the Lord's intense interest and love and regard and care for his people than what you find in Psalm 23 the Lord's my shepherd I'll not want he makes me down to lie in pastures green he leadeth me the quiet waters by and when we're singing this verse it's quite often that we sing as if in pastures green we're tied with he leadeth me in fact in pastures green as you can see from the punctuation are tied closely to he makes me down to lie so when we're singing we ought to try and convey the meaning of the psalm as well as other psalms of course and you have the same in the following verses as well and here the Lord's my shepherd

I'll not want pause he makes me down to lie in pastures green in other words lying in pastures green conveys that sense of God's provision of plenty and of calm and he moves on to speak of leading him beside the quiet waters so Psalm 23 the Lord's my shepherd the Lord's my shepherd I'll hold in expedient to play in pastures green he than a ìng me the soft catch down

Trail oncell amber and me to pray The pain within the heart of righteousness In for his own gain chain Yet all I know, yet all I know Yet well I fear, thou know For thou art with me out thy rod

And some he come more still My dear love has furnished In presence of my foes My head thou know With all I know And like a overflows Goodness the mercy of my life Shall surely follow me

And in those homes For evermore My wedding which shall be I'll go to the door to my right this evening Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ The love of God the Father And the communion of the Holy Spirit Be with you now and evermore Amen Thank you Thank you Thank you Thank you Thank you Thank you