

The importance of having a greater understanding of God

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Date: 19 June 2016

Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0 : 00] So turn with me, please, if you have your Bibles with you, to John chapter 9. John chapter 9. We're only going to be reading the first few verses and concentrating on a couple of those in particular.

But we'll pick up our reading in John 9 verse 1. John 9 verse 1. Now hear the word of God.

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.

We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no man, when no one can work.

[1 : 16] As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. Well, we'll leave it there because John's got this habit of rolling everything he says together.

And so we could read, you know, way to the end of the chapter, even into chapter 10. But we're going to concentrate on those five verses, verse 3, 4, and 5 in particular.

Before we do that, we're going to start. We're in John 9 verses 1 through to 5. If you're finding your way back there, let me remind you where we were last week.

Last week, we considered mental health. That is the mental health of a Christian. The Bible actually says quite a lot about having a good mental health, a good spiritual mental health.

And we're to be transformed by the renewing of our mind. And according to Scripture, whatever gets our mind gets us. And we also looked at a very important part, a very important principle that we're to remember.

[2 : 24] And this is kind of how I want to begin with this evening. That we were built to fear. We were created to fear. And it was a very important consideration because if you don't think that you were created that way, then you might give advice or you might give counsel like, well, there's no need to fear.

Or don't fear. And not only is that bad counsel, but it actually damages the individual because God created us to fear. It's a question of where that fear is directed.

It can either be directed to the world, the flesh, and the devil, and to the worries of the world. Or it can be directed to the Lord. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

So it's really important that we understand how we are created. It's also important to understand why God even created the world. I don't know if you know, but the world is made up of 12 plates.

12 very large plates. And they're called tectonic plates. And they range from sort of 12 miles thick to a number of miles more thick. 28 miles thick or even a little bit more than that.

[3 : 31] If you take the word tecton and you turn it and you translate it into English, you get the word carpenter. And I find it very interesting that the world is made up of 12 carpenter plates.

But is it really that shocking? I mean, isn't the world made by the carpenter? That everything was made by him and through him and for him?

It seems that as we read scripture that when God created the world, he created it in exactly the same way someone would create a window. Now, when somebody gets new windows, you may say, nice double glazing.

Or you may not even comment at all. But we all understand why the window is there. It's not to look at the window. It's to look at what we can see through the window. It's to let the light in through the window.

We'd be wasting a certain amount of time if we inspected the window unless we were a window inspector. But the purpose of a window is to let light in and to see what is on the other side.

[4 : 43] Well, the psalmist puts it this way, that the heavens declare the glory of God and the sky above proclaims it's his handiwork. In other words, that when you look at the universe and you look at the sky, you ought to see the glory of God.

You ought not to see just stars. It's a window to God. It's a window to the glory of God. And so God created the world in the same way as the purpose of a window.

We're to not look at it, but we are to look through it to what God is really displaying. Stars are beautiful. I don't know too much about stars, but, you know, you look up and you go, wow, especially on a dark night when it's clear.

But that's not really what we should be going wow at. We should be really wowing at the glory of God because that is what God wants us to see.

He doesn't just want us to look at a beautiful landscape and go, wow, we're to see the glory of God. We're not just to look at rough seas and go, wow, we're to see the glory of God.

[5 : 50] In other words, the world is a window to God's glory. And so open the eyes of my heart, Lord, that I don't just see the world, but I see what I am meant to see through the world, in the world.

You see, a lot of us can go around with our eyes open, but actually with our eyes shut when it comes to the glory of God. We don't actually see the glory of God. It's not that we can't see.

It's not even that we're not mindful of God. It's just that for some reason we are almost spiritually blinded to the glory of God, as if the scales need to be removed from our eyes, that God really needs to do, as Jesus Christ did here, a work on our life to be able to see that God has created everything for the purpose of his own glory.

Even you and me, God has created us for him, for his glory. Everything in this world, including you and me, is about displaying the glory of God, or either to function for the glory of God.

Now, being brought up in the Church of England, we had the 39 articles, which are really important, which most of the Church of England pay no attention to whatsoever now, which is a real shame.

[7 : 08] But also, being up here in Scotland with Presbyterian being as strong as what it was, you have the Westminster Catechism, larger and shorter. And if you've ever read it, the shorter one, let's say, it asked this question, the very first question, what is the chief end of man?

What is the purpose for which man exists? And the answer is this, the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

However, your whole purpose, according to God, your whole purpose, the whole reason why you are alive, is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

What is the will of God for my life? That's the will of God for your life. It's to glorify him and enjoy him forever and ever. Well, what happens then if I want a different purpose for my life?

Well, as I said, we become what we worship, you know, at the beginning of the service. Whatever we love the most, that's the thing that we become like. But you will soon find one day that you'll go to it and the cupboard is bare.

[8 : 22] It has nothing more to give you and it doesn't have much to start with. God created us to bring glory to him. In Romans 11, it puts us this way, for from him and through him, this is Romans 11 verse 36, for from him and through him and to him are all things.

To him be glory forever. Amen. And in 1 Corinthians 10 verse 31, it says, so whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God.

I think that pretty much covers everything. In other words, you cannot even get out of bed in the morning without it somehow or it ought to bring glory to God.

You can't sit down at the dinner table. You can't even make a cup of tea without it somehow bringing glory to God. So in order for us to understand what is going on with Jesus healing the blind man, we can't afford to be blind and miss the very thing that Jesus wants us to see.

To actually think this is about the healing of the blind man is to be blind on the passage itself. To focus on the blind man is to have a spiritual blindness about what the passage is really about.

[9 : 44] God has designed us in such a way that the way we see is by hearing. There's a very odd way of doing it, isn't it? But God has created you and I as people who can see properly only when we hear properly.

Okay? Faith comes by hearing. That real insight and sight comes by hearing. God needs to shine his light upon the world.

And he does that by speaking in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's the reason why we have God's word proclaimed this evening. That's the reason why we have Bible studies.

That's the reason why you have Bibles and read them for yourself. It's because we want to see clearly, but the only way we can see clearly is by reading everything God has actually said.

If the relationship is that we see by hearing God, then the equation is this. The more you hear of God, the better you see.

[10 : 54] So if you read half the Bible, let's say, you only see half as well as the person who reads all the Bible if you both read it properly and correctly.

Do you understand? We see by hearing. So let's remember a couple of things that we've remembered last week and for good reason.

God did not come into the world for us. That appears that way. We actually came into the world for him. You'll remember God created the world and he put us in it.

It was that way around. God came first. He has no beginning and no end and he created the world and put us in it. So we are in the world for God. God did not come in the world for us.

However, Jesus Christ came because we fell from the glory of God. All have fallen short of the glory of God. And Christ needs to restore us back into that glory.

[11 : 52] Why? Because we are created for the glory of God. So that's why Jesus has come. To actually take something that does not display the glory of God but was created to do so. And to be redeemed through the cross so that that one person, two person, or the many people can then bring glory to God just like they were meant to as they were originally created.

The trouble is we have all fallen short of that glory and we need Christ not to do it for us. We need Christ's glory in us. And that is the only way we can bring glory to God.

You know, Jesus came to redeem. He came to forgive. He came to do all those things. But he came to restore us back into the glory of God. Why? Because we have the purpose and the only purpose of bringing glory to God.

That's why God allows you to wake up tomorrow morning. Because for somehow and in some way, God will be glorified in your life or at least he ought to be glorified in your life.

Whatever it is you're doing. Eating, drinking, or sleeping. Whatever it is that you might be doing. Now if you get this wrong, you will wonder as you live in this world with some kind of relationship with God, who is here for who?

[13 : 10] Who is here for who? Okay? Well, to put it really simply, we are here for God. It's not the other way around. We are here for God.

It is true that Jesus is here for us, but Jesus is here for us because we are here for God. Okay? Jesus is here for us, but he's here for us because the purpose is because we are here for God.

That's what the glory of God is about. So let's look at this blind man, the disciples, and Jesus. Verse 1 begins with Jesus understanding that this man has been blind from birth.

That is confirmed, of course. Later on with the parents being asked by the Pharisees, you know, was he really blind in the first place? And the disciples asked, well, is he blind because of his sin or his parents' sin?

And Jesus effectively says, no, not this time. Not in this instance. That's not the reason this time. It is true that sin and suffering are linked together.

[14 : 19] In other words, if Adam didn't sin, then you wouldn't have the fall and you wouldn't have any other suffering that follows. And James says in 1 Corinthians, this is why some of you are ill, Paul says at the end of communion.

But Jesus is saying here, no, that's not the reason this time. But what is the reason? Well, look at verse 3, or rather the second part of verse 3.

He says, it was not that this man sinned or his parents, but, here's the reason. The but, the reason follows the but. But that the works of God might be displayed in him.

I struggle a great deal with why lives turn out the way that they do and why they can't be different and why people can't, even myself, mature in the Christian faith faster than what we do.

I guess I'm suffering with what the other pastor said, the lack of patience. You know, things take a long time to change and it's frustrating, terribly frustrating.

[15 : 25] But for God to be God and to say that this man is the way that he is for no other reason than that the works of God might be displayed in his life.

I mean, that's what verse 3 is saying. It's not that Jesus is saying, oh, I just so happen to come along and find a blind man and I'm going to display the works of God in his life. That's not what it's saying. Verse 3 quite explicitly says that the man is blind not because his parents have sinned or because he has sinned, but, here's the reason, but, that the works of God might be displayed in him.

In other words, to put it, this is sort of quite strong and perhaps heavy and you're probably not used to God's providence in this way, but your life is the way that it is.

Why do you have to go through the things that you have to go through when God could quite easily remove you from them? And the answer is this, because the works of God will be displayed in your life through what you go through.

Because you're here for God's glory, you're not here for your own purposes. You're here for God to fulfill his purposes through your life and not your own through your own.

[16 : 45] Now, that's a hard providence for some people, a real hard providence, but nevertheless, it's true. I don't want to make light of it, but at the same time, I don't want to ignore the truth of it.

So, I don't read this as if Jesus has just come along and found a blind man where the works of God can be displayed in him. No, it says quite clearly that this man is the way that he is so that the works of God might be displayed in him.

In other words, if you were to focus on this section and you were to focus that this is all about a blind man being healed, it's a bit like looking at the window rather than through it.

You're not really seeing what you're meant to see if you were to focus on the blind man himself being healed. And to proclaim this as a message of healing is also to miss the point.

It is true that the man gets healed. It is true that Jesus does heal him, and it is true that God can heal. But to focus this message or to think that the focus is all about a man who was born blind getting healed.

[17 : 59] Again, it's a bit like looking at a window frame rather than looking through the window to what God actually wants you to see. Remember, the heavens declare the glory of God.

It's a window to something else. Everything is a window to God. It's to display the glory of God. This man's life is no different. So we really need to see what God wants us to see.

And the lesson is fairly straightforward that there are people in the world who are blind. They're called unbelievers. And Jesus Christ is the light of the world that gives sight to the blind.

And what Jesus is doing here, what God has so prepared, is a real-life physical example of blindness which Jesus heals and then which he makes a spiritual point upon.

In other words, everybody gets it. Everybody gets that if you're blind and you can see physically, everybody understands what that means. Everybody understands that Jesus Christ has the power and the works of God has been displayed in a person's life.

[19 : 11] And so you're not just seeing a man who was once blind but who can now see, but what you see is a man who was once blind and can now see because of the work of God in his life.

And so not everyone is physically blind, but everyone in a fallen world is spiritually blind, of which Christ, the light of the world, is the only one who can display the works of God and do anything about your state, your condition.

As I said last Sunday morning, one of the great difficulties of following God is that God can say no. And we're just not used to God saying no.

And we're definitely not used to God saying no when he says yes to our neighbor. Why have you said yes to my Christian brother or sister and no to me?

Do you not treat us all the same? And the Bible says, where did you ever get that idea from? God doesn't treat us the same. Why? Because our lives are about bringing glory to God and God has his purposes and he works them out throughout his creation and we are part of that creation.

[20 : 29] It may be very difficult to let this settle, but you know that it's true. Or I'd hope you'd know that it was true.

So notice again then the importance of verse 3. Jesus is here to display the works of God. It's all about God. It's not about the blind man. It's not about the blind man's condition or circumstance.

It's all about displaying the work of God. Then Jesus says this, verse 4. We, and so he's including us in this, or rather I should say, he's including his disciples in this next bit particularly.

We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no man will work. Verse 5.

As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. Well, that's fairly straightforward enough, but I still don't think we've got it.

[21 : 34] In other words, when Jesus is taken from this world in his death and resurrection on the cross, what do you think happens to the light of the world? Well, the light of the world is no longer in the world.

And so the night has come when no man will work. And that's exactly what Jesus was referring to. Jesus says, listen to this. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day.

Night is coming when no man will work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. But when the light of the world is no longer in the world, when Jesus is taken on the cross, then the night has come.

When Jesus says, while it is day, he's referring to his own earthly ministry. He's referring to the fact that he is to do the work of God on earth. But when he speaks about the night coming, he's speaking about his death.

He's speaking about his crucifixion. And at that point, no work of God can be done. Because Jesus is not here to do it. The night has come when no man will work.

[22 : 57] Because Jesus is not here to do the works of him who sent him. And you know that to be true because what is the very thing that Jesus tells his disciples to do before Pentecost?

He tells them to do nothing. Why? Because no one can work at night. The night has come where no man can work. And so what are they to do?

They are to wait and wait and they're to wait in Jerusalem. For what? For God to come back. But to come back in the form of God, the Holy Spirit.

And then at that point, we become the lights in the world that Jesus referred to back in the Sermon on the Mount. That we are the salt and the light in this world.

And so what you begin to see is there is a period of time which night has come and no man can work. There was a period of time where the light was in the world. Jesus was in the world doing the works of God.

[23 : 59] But then night came at his death and crucifixion. And no one worked. Jesus said, you're not to do anything. You're to wait for the Comforter to come.

And he will lead you into all truth. And he will do the works for you at that point. And that's exactly what you find happening. And that's why this word we in verse 4 is so incredibly important.

It was important for the disciples before Jesus died. But it's even more important now or at least as important now for us now that Jesus Christ has gone to the Father but has given us the Holy Spirit that we may continue in this work.

Well, what is the work? Well, we are to work the works of him who sent Jesus. That's the reason that we are here.

Why? To bring glory to God. Jesus' life was simply to demonstrate the glory of God perfectly. In everything that he said and everything that he did and everywhere that he went it was to demonstrate the glory of God.

[25 : 10] In every healing, in every teaching moment it was to bring glory to God. And so what you find happening in Pentecost and we don't have time to go into it is that that commission that was given to Jesus has now been given to us that we are the salt and the light of the world.

In other words, we are to do the works of him who sent Jesus. And God the Holy Spirit is in our life so that that can happen.

Why? Because everything's about the glory of God. It's not about me filling in my own diary with all the things I'd like to do. I mean, you're certainly free to do that.

But even when you do those things it is to be done in the glory of God. Now we see this in a couple of different ways. If you were to read on in John you'll remember the story of Lazarus who was very friendly with Jesus and Jesus likewise with Lazarus.

A message came to Jesus saying that Lazarus is poorly, he's not dead yet but the implication was he's poorly, he's about to. And Jesus says let's move on from here.

[26 : 20] And you can imagine being a disciple thinking well this is Jesus that's no way to treat a person. And what does Jesus say? He says it's all about the glory of God.

He walks away and in 11 verse 4 he says this is for the glory of God if you want to look there just quickly. But when Jesus heard it he said this illness does not lead to death but it did.

It did in the eyes of the people. Does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God so that the Son of God may be glorified through it. In other words Jesus is saying I'm actually going to allow Lazarus to die.

I'm actually going to ordain. I'm going to plan it so that Lazarus dies. And I can understand how shocking that is going to be to everyone who knows Lazarus and knows me of what I can actually do.

But I'm going to allow him to die. Why? So that God would be glorified. So the Son of God would be glorified through it. Jesus said it doesn't lead to death. Imagine the disciples when they tell Jesus Lazarus has died.

[27 : 30] Or Jesus finds out that Lazarus has died. And then if you go to 11 verse 40 this is what it says. Jesus said to her this is Martha at this point.

Jesus said to her did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God? And of course they took away the stone and Lazarus is told to come forth by Jesus.

Jesus said to her in other words just think about it for a moment from the point of view of just men and women boys and girls.

But don't think as though you know this story. Think as though you're in the background and all you have seen is that the Son of God who can do something doesn't but walks away.

and then you're trying to figure out why has this happened? And you say well Jesus did say something about the glory of God but I don't understand how Jesus walking away and not doing anything when we need him to do something actually brings glory to God.

[28 : 43] I just can't comprehend it. But then at a much later time you see it because Jesus does something that you perhaps didn't expect.

and I think that's quite similar to quite a lot of our lives. Why is this not happening now when I expected it to happen but a few years later perhaps decades later something happens that brings total glory to God that seems to make sense to us.

Sometimes it does and sometimes it doesn't. But it is all about Jesus. It is all about God. It is all about bringing glory to him.

In John chapter 9 it's also about the glory of God because the Pharisees if you read on don't believe that the man was born blind in the first place. They actually go to his parents and say is it really the case that he was?

Yes it is the case that he was. So they call him for a second time John 9 verse 24 and they tell him to give glory to God. but they fail to see that that is exactly what Jesus has done by healing him by doing the works of him who sent him.

[30 : 01] They tell the blind man to give glory to God okay because he can now see but they want to kill Jesus who did the works of God in his life.

in other words in short we ought to see that his life verse 3 under the divine providence of God was going to bring glory to God but he suffered blindness from birth until the day that it did until God's purpose in his life was fulfilled the way God wanted it to be.

I mean surely you really do believe that God can handle us individually one by one that God doesn't have to deal with us in a group you know like three to one leaders or something but God knows us so well individually he's able to perfectly fine tune every moment of our life and work perfectly in it that not a single thing somehow misses God's attention.

Well to conclude let's remember a few things we are now that we have God's spirit within us to do verse 4 we are to work the works of him who sent Jesus and we're to do this because God has given us his spirit so that we can do it but more importantly we are to do it for the reasons that Jesus understood and that was to bring glory to God through everything that we do the disciples were to understand that their lives were to bring glory to God but perhaps you see yourself more like the blind man this evening where you you're you're just in other words you're the blind man before Jesus has touched you and you just struggle with the fact that God has you this way and he's not changing it he's not changing your circumstances but we shouldn't think that somehow that the man seeing is what only brings glory to God all of life whatever we do whatever our circumstance brings glory to God remember everything's a window on the glory of God we may struggle to see it but that doesn't mean that it's not to be seen we may struggle to comprehend it but that doesn't mean that it's not the case and just because there's a what's known as a logical fallacy which means an argument that doesn't make any sense but people use it and one of the arguments is this that if I can understand it it's not true and a lot of people use that argument that if I can understand it it's not true

I don't understand a lot of things that I still have to believe because the Bible tells me so and I want to believe but boy do I struggle to see it as it really is but I understand that the world's created and I'm created the stars are created as a window that I'm not just to see that but I'm to see through it to the glory of God so let's just spell it out what if the biggest problem in the church is that people Christians don't actually see God what if the biggest problem for us our biggest problem is not our Christian life or our failure not to sin or whatever it is but our biggest problem is that we don't actually understand God if I ask you to grab your husband by your hand and explain him to me could you if I ask you to explain God to me could you what if the biggest problem is that we don't understand

[34 : 07] God what about if you don't see that your life is for the purpose of God's glory that just because God is able to see how he is glorified through your life and you can't shouldn't be a cause of frustration it should be a cause of rejoicing we don't know we're not God we can't figure it out and as you look at your husband or you look at your wife you look at your children or you look at your Christian brothers and sisters here tonight do you really know what their life should display that all of us here sat here this evening standing here this evening is to display the glory of God that's the one thing that we should want and pray for out of the lives of people here what would it look like if we as a church thought about it to such an extent that we really began to do everything that we did whatever we do whether we eat sleep or drink mow the lawn tidy the house do the dishes who are the carpet whatever it is for the glory of God

I once met a man in the church of England when we used to have a Wednesday night Bible studies and I would go up and sometimes I'd be early and he was quite I thought quite pernickety on the way the chairs used to be put out and I said you know why do you do them the way that you do why do you you know lie and everything and certain and I understand the need for it to be tidy and in order and straight you know I appreciate that but he was even worse than me it was you know I thought I had a problem with you know pernickety but he he was professional at it and he he made the point and quite easily that I set them out if Jesus was going to sit on one himself I got the point got it now everything that you do do it all to the glory of God and here's the thing that will happen when you do the moment that you begin to see the glory of God that you don't just see things but you see through them to the glory of

God everything else becomes a dull gray everything else becomes quite boring and you become quite disinterested in it it's a bit like going from or it's it's not even a bit like it's nothing like it but this is a poor illustration it's a bit like going watching a black and white fuzzy TV to see in HD full color to look through things to the glory of God is to truly see to look at things is to miss the point entirely so open the eyes of my heart Lord that I may see you amen