

# I WAS BLIND, NOW I SEE

John 9:1-41

*My memory is nearly gone but I remember two things. That I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great Savior (John Newton)*

## THE SIGHT OF THE SIGN

*1 As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth.*

John introduces us to a nameless man who's known for two things — 1. He's been blind since birth. 2. From verse 8 we know his only means of income is begging in the streets. This is the 1<sup>st</sup> century in a Jewish province of the Roman Empire. There's no Americans with Disabilities Act. Your only source of income is begging in the streets. And it's humiliating. Not only can you not see — but people don't see you. You're blind and the world is blind to you.

Jesus is not blind to this man. He sees him and his world is about to change.

*2 And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"*

Now, given his state of blindness and poverty — Jesus' disciples ask what causes this man's suffering? Did he or his parents do something to cause this? This understanding was common in Judaism at the time. And actually — it's still pretty common today. We know from Genesis 1-3 that our world was created good — even very good — but when sin entered into our world — suffering became part of our experience. So in one sense — suffering is a result of sin.

But to assume that a person's specific situation of suffering is the direct result of their sin or their parent's sin wrongly applies that principle. A well-known Jewish saying from the Talmud sums up this false principle —

*"There is no death without sin, and there is no suffering without iniquity." — b. Sanhedrin 55a*

It's one thing to understand that all suffering is the result of living in a sinful world and that sometimes there are obvious connections between sinful actions and natural consequences — but to make a direct connection — a tight cause and effect relationship — between someone's suffering and their sin or their parents sin — goes beyond the biblical evidence — and adds further shame and suffering to the sufferer.

So how does Jesus respond?

*3 Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him."*

Jesus corrects their theology. This man's suffering is not a result of his sin or his parents sin — but His suffering is held in the sovereign hand of God so that God might display his glorious works through him. This man's suffering will not be wasted.

This blind man had no idea what God was up to or what He was doing. But his ignorance to the purposes and glory of God do not change the reality that God was preparing him to display his glory in him.

Vaneetha Rendall Risner knows a thing or two about suffering. As a child she contracted polio, and as an adult, she suffered the loss of an infant child, and was later left by her husband to be a single mom. Commenting on this passage she writes...

*Jesus's answer to the disciples stunned me...Jesus recognized that the blind man's condition wasn't his fault. Rather than condemn him, Jesus honored and dignified him. This blind man's suffering wasn't a punishment; God was going to use his life. The works of God would be displayed in him. Could God be telling me that my life would display his work as well? It seemed crazy to believe that he would use my pain for something good, but somehow I sensed he would. I knelt at the side of my bed and committed my life to a God I didn't know but who certainly knew me.*

I know it seems crazy that God uses pain for something good — that God uses suffering for glory — that God turns darkness into light — but that's what He does. Here we have a picture of that reality in the blind man.

Paul explains this in his letter to the Corinthians...

#### ***2 Corinthians 4:17-18***

***17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.***

When our hindsight becomes 20/20...we will all be able to look back on our present suffering — no matter how heavy and brutal and say — it was light and momentary.

And it is not wasted. Our suffering is doing something. It's achieving and working an eternal weight of glory beyond what you can imagine. And you might be saying — But I can't see it. I can't see what it is that it's doing.

But that's the point! Paul says its beyond comparison. It's beyond what you can see. So this story and Paul tells us — don't look at your circumstances — when you lose your job, when you find out it's cancer, when you are staring death itself in the face. Don't let the circumstances define reality. Look to Jesus — Look to this word and know that your suffering is not meaningless — it's doing something that you can't see — but one day you will.

***4 We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. 5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." 6 Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud 7 and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.***

Jesus says that while it is still day — they must be about doing the work of God the Father. For night is coming and his present ministry will come to an end. This is yet another allusion to his arrest and subsequent death.

Then Jesus says again — I am the light of the world and proceeds to bring light to this blind man. Jesus makes some mud with his saliva and anointed the man's eyes and sends him to the pool of Siloam. The man obeys the words of Jesus and washed and for the first time in his life — he could see.

Now, John goes on to say that when he returned from the pool of Siloam, the townspeople noticed that the blind beggar's eyes had been opened. They recognize him — but the shock of the miracle — the impossibility of a blind man receiving sight — stirs up debate among the townspeople.

Some affirmed that this was the formerly blind man. Others couldn't believe that this man had been healed and so they conclude that this man was not the blind man — but his merely his doppelgänger.

The blind man insists that he's been healed — by the man they call Jesus — and he recounts the details of what happened — but he doesn't know where Jesus has gone. Now the towns people have a choice to make — believe the sign given to them — or come up with another explanation.

## THE SKEPTICISM OF THE SIGN

***13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind.***

The neighbors bring the man to religious authorities to get their opinion on the matter. If a true miracle has happened, it should be authenticated...and if authenticated...the significance of that miracle should be considered.

***14 Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 15 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." 16 Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them. 17 So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet."***

Now John adds an all important detail — this healing took place on the Sabbath. According to the stringent Pharisaical Law, healing was work and work is forbidden on the Sabbath unless someones life was on the line. So the religious leaders start discussing the matter and two groups emerge.

Group A comes to the conclusion — Jesus is guilty of breaking Sabbath Law and therefore — He cannot come from God. So here's how that logic worked. Jesus healed this man on the Sabbath. Healing is work. Work on the Sabbath is sin. Jesus is a sinner and therefore — He is not from God because God would not send a sinner.

Group B comes to the conclusion — That Jesus is sent from God. Here's how their logic worked. This sign is unlike anything we've ever seen. In fact — there isn't a single recording of a blind person receiving sight in the Old Testament. They only way Jesus could restore this man's sight is if he were sent from God.

They ask the former blind man what he thinks — and he says — He is a prophet. Notice he's progressed in his journey of faith. In verse 11 he was "the man called Jesus" and now he's a prophet.

***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 19 and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" 20 His parents answered, "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. 21 But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself."***

As the investigation progresses, the religious leaders call the man's parents to testify. Their initial doubts have given way to skepticism and they don't believe that he had really been born blind or that he had received his sight. They're looking for something to discredit this man and reveal that Jesus is a scammer. The parents affirm that their son was blind from birth and that he did truly receive sight — though they don't know how and since he is of legal age — he can speak for himself.

***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."***

Now they bring the man back in for another round of questioning. And now their skepticism has become full blown cynicism. They turn up the heat and demand that he tell them the truth.

That phrase — "Give glory to God" — is saying — Don't take the glory from God. Confess that you know this man is not a prophet — but a sinner and that he is not from God.

***25 He answered, "Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."***

The man isn't playing their game. He's not going to be bullied into discrediting Jesus. Then he says those most famous words — One thing I do know — that though I was blind...now I see. They start questioning him again and he gives his final assessment of who Jesus is.

***30 The man answered, "Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. 31 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. 32 Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."***

Follow his logic with me — Our Scriptures testify that no one born blind has ever had their eyes open. And the Scriptures testify that only God can give sight to the blind.

***Exodus 4:11***

***Then the LORD said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?"***

And again in Psalm 146:8 — ***The LORD opens the eyes of the blind...***

And since God is the only one who can open the eyes of the blind and Jesus opened my eyes — then at the very least — Jesus is sent from God. Do they stop to consider the well reasoned logic of the man? Look at their response in verse 34...

***34 They answered him, "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out.***

Instead of considering his claims — they resort to personal attack and they cast him out. They shame him and rehearse the lie that his blindness was due to his sin. Simply put — they don't want to see Jesus for who he is. Their hardened heart has caused spiritual blindness. It's not that they can't see Jesus — It's that they don't want to.

Their skepticism and cynicism created a confirmation bias. When you don't want something to be true — you reject facts, sources, and reason that don't align with you're already determined conclusion. They're not seeking the truth. They're seeking validation for their rejection of Jesus. We see this over and over in the gospels — faith seeks understanding — while cynicism seeks validation. The pharisees and religious leaders were unwilling to consider that maybe — just maybe — their understanding of the Sabbath was wrong. That maybe they had made some faulty assumptions and premises about Jesus which led to wrong conclusions. If they had an open heart — these teachers of Israel would have remembered the ancient promise of Isaiah 42.

***Isaiah 42:6-7***

***"I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.***

If you read the whole chapter, you'll see that one of the signs of the dawning of the messianic age was the restoration of sight to the blind. And ironically — the religious leaders — who should have known are blind to the promises of God — and it's happening right before their very eyes.

What characterizes our posture when we come to Jesus? Is it faith seeking understanding? Or cynicism seeking validation? The difference between the two is everything. One leads to sight and the other leads to blindness.

Hardened skepticism eventually becomes settled cynicism and when that happens — you miss the significance of the sign. Now — Let's look at verses 35-41 with faith seeking understanding so that we don't miss the significance of the sign.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SIGN

*35 Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” 36 He answered, “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” 37 Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.” 38 He said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.*

When Jesus heard that the man had been cast out of the synagogue, he sought him out. Just like Jesus took initiative to engage the blind man initially — Here Jesus again takes the initiative and finds him.

And also remember — up until this point — the man hasn't seen Jesus. He spoke with him while he was blind — then he washed and received his sight — but he has not actually seen Jesus.

Jesus asks him — Do you believe in the Son of Man? We've seen this title before in John — The Son of Man was Jesus' favorite way of referring to himself. It's a title from Daniel Chapter 7 and it's filled with Messianic imagery.

Then the man asks — who is he so that I may believe in him? And Jesus says — you're looking at him

So in other words — Jesus asks — do you believe that I am the Messiah sent from God? And he said — Lord I believe.

Now think about the progression of his faith. When he first met Jesus, Jesus rubbed some mud over his eyes and said to go wash in the pool. He followed Jesus' instruction and he came back seeing. Then as he considered who Jesus was, he grew in understanding and of who Jesus is — from the man they call Jesus to a prophet to belief that he was the Son of Man — the Messiah. His faith wasn't perfect — but was growing and deepening — as he sought to live in the grace he had been shown.

And now by grace through faith — he's worshipping Jesus. Grateful for his sight and grateful that he's seen the Savior — the one sent by God to bring restoration and deliverance.

Now, in the next verse 39 — Jesus tells the man the significance of the sign. Remember — the sign is not the point — but what the sign points to. Every time we see a sign in John we should be asking — what is the significance of this sign.

John has carefully chosen a specific set of signs as he composed his gospel. His stated purpose in John 20:31 is

*that we would believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing we would have life in his name.*

So — Let's look at verse 39 to see the significance —

*39 Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.”*

Let's unpack that — Jesus is saying — His signs are a dividing line. People have to do something with the signs he performs. They can't remain neutral. The signs point to Jesus and reveal who He is and what He has come to do. And for some, the signs serve as a drawing mechanism toward belief in Jesus Christ. For those with faith who seek understanding — the signs are confirming and eye opening. For those with cynicism seeking validation, the signs actually serve to validate their unbelief.

Jesus is saying — those who are blind will receive sight. Those who think they see — they will find out that they're actually blind.

And then as John brings this story to a close — we find there are Pharisees listening into the conversation —

***40 Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, “Are we also blind?” 41 Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.***

They sense the implications of what Jesus said to the man and they act appalled — they want to know if Jesus thinks they are blind. And Jesus says well — if you were spiritually blind and recognized your need — then I would give you sight. But the problem is that you don’t think you’re blind and in your pride — you don’t recognize your need and therefore — your guilt and your blindness remains.

The scene ends with the formerly blind man seeing and affirmed while those who reject Jesus are judged to be blind and remaining in their guilt.

D.A. Carson summarizes this passage well...

***When the light shines, some are made to see like this man born blind, while others, who think they see, turn away, blinded as it were, by the light.***

Throughout the story the blind man progresses from darkness to light, from blindness to sight, from being an outcasted sinner to being an affirmed disciple who rightly worships Jesus. The religious leaders progress from light to darkness, from sight to blindness, from being righteous insiders to being condemned as those who wrongly reject Jesus.

The significance of this sign is that Jesus is the light who conquers darkness and without light, without him there is no sight.

## **GOSPEL**

From beginning to the end — when you think about God’s story of redemption — Jesus is the light that brings and end to our darkness. He restores the blindness of our sin and in the gospel gives us his light so that we can see once again. In the Garden sin brought darkness to God’s world of light. And no one needs convincing that we live in a land of deep darkness. Everywhere we turn there’s brokenness and blindness. But God being rich in mercy and love has sent the Light of the World to shine into our hearts.

### ***2 Corinthians 4:6***

***For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.***

We need light to see — It’s a fundamental reality to sight — without light — there is no sight. Likewise — without Jesus there is only darkness and blindness. Those who recognize their blindness receive the light of Jesus as their only hope. John 9 emphatically tell us that Jesus has the ability to bring someone — anyone — from darkness to light from blindness to sight.

If you have not had the light of Christ shine into your heart? What stops you? You can receive that light — today — even now. How do you receive that light? By simply recognizing that you are in fact blind and asking God to shine the light of Christ into your heart — to give you faith to believe in Him.

If you have received that light. Its good to remember where we were when we met the grace of Jesus. Do you remember where you were and who you were when Jesus removed your blindness and with the eyes of faith you began to see? Let’s remember that moment and be encouraged to walk in the light as Jesus is in the light as we live lives of humble gratitude for all that God has done.