

The blind man encounters Jesus \* John 9  
November 6, 2022 \* Langford Community Church \* Graham Gladstone

In the bulletin this morning I've included a very famous image.<sup>i</sup> How many of you have seen that before?

Now tell me - who can see a beautiful young regal looking lady? And who sees an older woman, wrinkled and torn? (Apparently after this picture was first published in 1888, it was republished with the heading 'My wife and my mother-in-law').

The reason that I've shown you this picture this morning is that it illustrates an idea at the heart of our passage for today: things can change depending on how you look at them. Your perspective determines how you see things.

And it's not just optical illusions that change this way, the world works this way too. Some things that the world says are fine and normal - look at them from God's point of view and you realize they're not so good after all.

Turn with me to John 9 and I'll show you why I say that. John chapter 9, one of my favourite passages in all of the Bible.

John 9:1 –

NIV John 9:1 As he went along [not far from the Temple], he saw a man blind from birth.  
2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

The disciples here are working out of an assumption that was common in these days that if something bad happened to someone, it must mean that they must have done something bad and that God was punishing them. The book of Job and the book of Ecclesiastes make it clear that that's just not how God works, but people nonetheless kept clinging to that idea. The disciples clearly thought this way and they're trying to work out if this man is paying for his own sin or that of his parents.

Jesus though is having none of it. Verse 3 -

3 "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.  
4 As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.  
5 While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

Now I have to admit that this makes me feel kind of uncomfortable. When it says 'this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life,' it makes it sound as though God has arbitrarily decided to make this guy blind from birth, subject him and his family to the trials of blindness in a world with no social security, no seeing eye dogs, no braille, just so that Jesus can come along twenty, thirty years later and bring glory to God by healing him. That just doesn't sound like the way that God operates.

And you know what? It's not. If you're working from an ESV Bible or and KJV, you'll see that that word 'happened' just isn't there in the text. That's an interpretive decision that the NIV has made and I don't think it's the best one that they could have made. It literally says something like 'but in order that the

works of God may be displayed in him' and a lot of experts just go right into the next sentence – 'we must do the works of God.' So following Ben Witherington, the issue is not that God caused him to be born blind; this man was born blind and God will use his case for His glory.<sup>ii</sup> That seems way more consistent to me with God's character. So:

6 Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes.  
7 "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means Sent).

Pause the action here for a minute. Put yourself in this man's shoes. Sandals. All his life he's been blind. He's never seen a sunrise, he's never seen a sunset; he's never even seen his parents. He has spent his whole life begging, relying on charity, sitting way down on the lowest rungs of the ladder of society.

And then this guy Jesus comes along, out of the blue, and rubs spit mud on your eyes and says 'Go, wash in the pool I'm sending you to.' What are you going to do? Is this just another cruel joke life has played on you? Can you trust that this Jesus guy is good and reliable? What would you do?

Well, we know what the man did.

So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

Simple as that. No fanfare. No 'step right up, watch me heal this blind man.' Jesus says to him 'trust me and do as I say' and the man does and Jesus gives the man sight.

Just imagine this guy's experience. He came up out of the water and for the first time ever, he experienced colour. He experienced depth. He finally saw what it was that made all those textures he had touched. He looked at his reflection in the water in the pool and for the first time ever saw what he looked like.

Jesus had given him sight and so much more.

8 His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?"

9 Some claimed that he was. Others said, "No, he only looks like him." But he himself insisted, "I am the man."

This is interesting – ultimately John 9 is about what people do when they see what Jesus has done. Ultimately Jesus has healed a blind man and here we have one of the first responses to this healing – disbelief.

'This looks like the man, but it can't possibly be!' How willfully blind do you have to be to doubt that the person who once was blind but now can see is actually the blind man from before? As a kid, my grandma Gladstone wore glasses all her life but did so less towards the end of her life – she looked totally different but I knew it was here. It's like Clark Kent and Superman. And this guy hasn't even taken glass off. He's just straight up the same guy. And yet, disbelief. They see what Jesus did and can't believe it. That's disbelief.

10 "How then were your eyes opened?" they demanded.

11 He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see." 12 "Where is this man?" they asked him. "I don't know," he said.

Not knowing what to do about this, they brought him to the religious experts. Verse 13.

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

John has kept one very important detail from us –

14 Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath.

You're not supposed to do work on the Sabbath, you're not supposed to mix paste on the Sabbath<sup>iii</sup> and yet that's exactly what Jesus did. The question is how will people respond to the reality that 'Jesus healed a blind man... on the Sabbath'?

15 Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see."

16 Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." (They're looking at the reality: 'Jesus healed a blind man on the Sabbath' but all they can see is the Sabbath part.)

But others asked, "How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?" So they were divided.

17 Finally they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened." The man replied, "He is a prophet."

18 The Jews still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents.

Now this is interesting, because if you recall, this whole story began with the question of who had caused the man's blindness, him or his parents. And apparently they weren't far away because they got hauled in before the Pharisees to testify themselves. Verse 19 –

19 "Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?"

They figure if anybody knows that this is really the blind man and not just some guy who really looks like him it's his parents. They reply –

20 "We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind.

21 But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself."

22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for already the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue.

23 That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

This I think is another way that people respond to the work of God – fear. Fear of sticking your neck out. Fear of standing up for Jesus. They know that the Jews are going to excommunicate anyone who says

Jesus is God and they don't want that, so they just pass the buck onto their son. They respond to the work of Jesus with fear.

24 A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God," they said. "We know this man [Jesus] is a sinner." (They're still stuck on the Sabbath part).

25 He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" (He's focused on the healing part).

26 Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

27 He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?"

28 Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses!

29 We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from."

This is response number 3 – unbelief. They're so stuck in their ways, righteous as they may be, that they are not willing to see what God is actually doing in the world. They see that 'Jesus healed a blind man on the Sabbath,' fixate on the Sabbath part and consequently refuse to believe that Jesus is sent by God. This is unbelief.

30 The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes.

31 We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will.

32 Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind.

33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." Preach brother!

34 To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out.

All because Jesus had healed his blindness.

35 Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

36 "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him."

37 Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you."

38 Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.

Response number four to the work of God – belief. This man, who has already trusted Jesus enough to go to wash in the pool of Siloam now takes the final step and says 'Lord, I believe in you.' Jesus healed a blind man on the Sabbath and the man responded with belief.

But here's the thing; John 9 is not just about the healing of the blind man. John chapter 9 is about *spiritual* blindness and spiritual sight too. That much is clear from the end of the chapter. Verse 39 -

39 Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."

40 Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?"

41 Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains (Joh 9:1-41 NIV).

What's going on here?

Well, once again, Jesus is using a physical phenomenon to talk about a spiritual reality.

With Nicodemus, it was being born again. Not literally being born but being made new, entirely new, a clean break from the past and a brand new start.

With the woman at the well, it was living water. Not actual water, but living water, spiritual vitality, spiritual life that flows from deep within.

Here now Jesus is talking about blindness, but He's not just talking about the inability to actually see; He's talking about spiritual blindness: the inability to see what God is doing and so escape from the darkness of sin.

See, at the beginning of chapter 9, the blind man is not the only one who cannot see. In fact, without Jesus, we are all in a state of spiritual blindness. Because of our willful ignorance of God, we are stuck in the darkness of sin, just as the blind man with stuck in the darkness of sight.

But God loved us too much to leave us that way – He came into the world in the person of His Son – to give us sight and to deliver us from the darkness and blindness of sin. And as miraculous as the healing of the blind man was, Jesus one-upped Himself with the greatest work of God that He could ever accomplish – He died to pay for sin and rose again to give us life.

The question is – how are we going to respond? With disbelief? 'I can't imagine the Cross happened.' With fear? 'I don't want people to think I'm weird for being a Christian.' With unbelief? 'I refuse to believe in a risen Saviour.' Or with belief? Like the blind man.

In a sense, the healing of the blind man, the Cross, the Resurrection, they're all spiritual eye exams to see how well we can see.

When we say, along with the blind man, "Lord, I believe," Jesus enables us to truly see. He delivers us from the blindness of sin and gives us spiritual sight. He gives us the spiritual sensitivity that we need to recognize the ways that He is at work in the world.

To see the works of God and refuse to believe – that's the essence of spiritual blindness; to see what God has done and trust in Him – that's spiritual sight.

The question is – will we believe?

As Gary Burge puts it: "Will I believe – with the blind man – or will I ask antagonistic questions – with the leaders?"<sup>iv</sup> Will I respond with disbelief, unbelief, fear or faith?

Let Jesus open the eyes of your heart.

Now, a few years ago, I might have left it there, but I think that it need to take it one step further. Because the reality is that many of us agree with the song – ‘I once was lost but now I’m found, was blind, but now I see.’

What does this passage mean to us if the eyes of our hearts have already been opened? We’ve put our faith in Jesus and received spiritual sight – what difference does this make to us now that we have believed? Let me put it to you like this:

If you were blind but now you see then see the world through eyes of faith. Here’s what I mean by that. I’ll give you two applications.

First, see the world from God’s perspective. Just like the image in the bulletin, you can look at something and see it two different ways, can’t you? Grumbling, complaining, pride, sexuality without bounds, anger and greed and selfishness – the world looks at those things and says – they’re just a part of life, or even good. They help you get ahead.

Look at those same things from God’s perspective though and you realize that they’re not all consistent with God’s good and life-giving character. Rather than giving life, they take it away.

If God has opened the eyes of your heart, then look at the world from His perspective. See the world the way He does. Let the Bible and God’s character shape the way you see things. Have you ever been to a 3D movie where they give you these 3D glasses – you look at the picture by yourself and it’s fuzzy and foggy, put those glasses on and all of a sudden you can see clearly. Put on God’s glasses to see the world – the Bible, His character – those things allow us to see the world from God’s point of view. See the world from God’s point of view.

That’s the first application – the second is this – if you were blind but now you see, then keep your eyes open to see what God is doing in the world. If God has opened the eyes of your heart, then God has given you a degree of spiritual sensitivity that allows you to look beyond the physical things of this world to recognize where God is at work. God sightings I think Don Wonacott used to say. Keep your eyes open for the places where God is at work. See God at work in other people, in Creation, in your interactions with others. If you watch for the ways that God is at work in the world, you’ll see Him do some wonderful things and then you can partner with Him in accomplishing them.

If you were blind but now you see then see the world through eyes of faith.

## BENEDICTION

1 Thessalonians 3:12-13 - May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

---

<sup>i</sup> They are both trapped in this famous optical illusion that first appeared on an 1888 German postcard and was later adapted by British cartoonist William Ely Hill, who published it in a humor magazine in 1915 with the title "My Wife and My Mother-in-Law." <https://www.livescience.com/63645-optical-illusion-young-old-woman.html>

<sup>ii</sup> Ben Witherington, *John's Wisdom*, 182.

<sup>iii</sup> Mixing paste on the Sabbath is forbidden by M. Shabbat 7:2 (Witherington, 183).

<sup>iv</sup> Gary Burge, *The Gospel of John* (NIVAC), 279.