

"Encounters With Jesus"
"The Man Born Blind"

One day Jesus and his disciples are walking along and come across a blind man, sitting and begging. He's been blind from birth. As they approach him, the disciples ask Jesus, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man, or his parents?" (John 9:2). This question reflects a common belief back then, that if you were sick, it was the direct result of your sin. And since this man was blind from birth, maybe it was because of his parents' sins.

Jesus refutes this simplistic view of suffering. "Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him'" (John 9:3). Jesus says in effect, "I'm going to use this man's illness to show you the glory of God!"

So, Jesus goes to work! He spits on the ground. Mixes His saliva with the dirt, and puts this on the man's eyes. It's a turnoff to us, but this was a common means of healing at that time. Then Jesus tells the man to go, wash in the Pool of Siloam. "Then he went and washed and came back able to see" (John 9:7).

Here again, in this series where we're looking at Jesus' encounters with various people, we come across another healing miracle! Healing was a huge part of Jesus' ministry! And this is a heart-warming story! A man who *never* was able to see can now see! For the first time in his life he sees his family members, blue sky and clouds, the food he eats, a pretty face! Sight is a wonderful gift, isn't it! I've worn eyeglasses since I was about 5 or 6 years old. As I got older, my eyesight got worse. I had trouble reading the Bible unless the print was large. Billy Graham once said Bibles with small print are a work of the devil! My eyesight's been better since I had cataracts removed. Some of you can identify with what I'm saying, can't you!

Praise the Lord that Jesus enables this man to see for the very first time in his life! What happens in *the rest of the story* is in some ways hard to believe! "The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, 'Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?' Some were saying, 'It is he.' Others were saying, 'No, but it is someone like him.' He kept saying, 'I am the man'" (John 9:8-9). "Hey, isn't this that blind beggar? Look, he can see now!" Others said, "Nah, it's just somebody who *looks like him*. People born blind don't suddenly see!"

But the healed man keeps saying, "No! It's *me*! "Well, how did it happen?" "This man Jesus put mud on my eyes, told me to wash in the Pool of Siloam...I did it...and I can now see!" Apparently somebody felt that if a miracle really did take place, the religious authorities ought to be notified.

So, he's brought to the Pharisees, that group known for their super strict observance of the Jewish law. (Oh, by the way, Jesus healed this blind man *on the Sabbath*. According to the Pharisees, this meant Jesus was "working" on the Sabbath by healing him. He broke the Sabbath laws). The Pharisees ask the man the obvious question: How did you get your sight? He explains to them what happened. "Some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.' But others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?' And they were divided" (verse 16). This man's not from God – some say – he doesn't observe the

sabbath. Others argue, if he's such a sinner, would he be able to do such a miracle? Finally, they turn to the blind man: "What do you have to say about this?" The blind man responds, "He's a *prophet*" (verse 17).

A lot of the Jews still don't believe this was the blind guy, so they go to his parents. "Is this your son? Was he blind?" "Yeah...this is our boy...and he *was* born blind...but we don't know how he was healed, or who healed him. He's of age, ask *him!*" Look at John's comments on this: "His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore, his parents said, 'He is of age; ask him'" (John 9:22-23). Isn't it something when religion is so intimidating that it has people scared?

The Pharisees call the blind man back in. The whole scenario starts to look like Comedy Central, if it weren't so sad. "Listen," they tell him, "Give God the glory, not this man who healed you, because he's a sinner." The blind man shoots back, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see" (verse 25). Again the Pharisees ask, "What did he do to you? How did he do to you?" "I already told you...why do you want me to go over this again, *do you want to become his disciple!*" Well, that really ticks them off! "Then they reviled him, saying, 'You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from'" (verses 28-29).

"Now this is really something," he says, "You're religious leaders. You don't know where he comes from, yet he gave me sight. Certainly he must be from God. No one ever heard of anybody opening the eyes of a man born blind." Then they really get nasty: "They answered him, 'You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?' And they drove him out" (verse 34).

Jesus gets word that they've thrown this guy out, so he hunts him down. When he finds him, he asks him, "Do you believe in the Son of man?" (verse 35). This is one of the titles of the Messiah, who is to come. Check his response: "He answered, 'And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.' Jesus said to him, 'You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.' He said, 'Lord, I believe.' And he worshipped him" (verses 36-38).

The next verse is so important to the story: "Jesus said, 'I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind'" (verse 39). I think the J. B. Phillips translation captures the gist of what Jesus is saying: "My coming into this world is itself a judgment – those who cannot see have their eyes opened, and those who *think* they can see become blind."

Some of the Pharisees, apparently smarting under Jesus' words, ask, "You're not saying *we're* blind, are you? How does Jesus answer them? The New International Version is a bit clearer: "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains" (verse 41).

My goodness! There's a lot going on here, isn't there! It's a miracle story of healing, but much more! It's not just about a blind man, back then. It's about *blind people*, back then, and now. It's not just about *physical* blindness, but about a blindness that's much more pervasive and dangerous!

Who's blind in this story? Sure, the guy born blind. *But how about the disciples* – assuming he was blind because of his sin, or his parents' sins. *The crowd*, the people who knew him? They couldn't believe it was him when he appeared with his eyesight intact! *What about the man's parents?* Were they blind? Hesitant to confirm their son's healing for fear of being put out of the synagogue. *What about the Pharisees!* You want to talk about blindness! Instead of *celebrating* this man's miraculous healing, and thanking Jesus for it, they are all bent out of shape! "He broke our laws! He was working on the Sabbath! He's not from God!" They are nasty, and insulting, to the blind man, his parents, and Jesus.

There's a blindness that has nothing to do with physical blindness. We can be blind to reality. Blind to truth. Blinded by self-interest, self-centeredness. We can be *spiritually blind* – unable to grasp and understand the ways of God and things of the Spirit. I served a church where there was a blind man, very active in the congregation. He had been blind for many years. I felt so bad for him. But he wasn't spiritually blind. He loved the Lord. He taught and preached the Word. On the other hand there were some in that church who could see very well physically, but their spiritual sight, their experience of God, was dim, or non-existent.

For me, it's hard reading this story in the 9th chapter of John without asking the question that some of the Pharisees asked Jesus, "Am I blind too?" Jesus came to take away our blindness. He said, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (John 9:5).

One of the most beautiful things about this story is that this man was not only healed *physically*, but also in coming to faith in Jesus. There is a progression: First he calls Jesus a man. Verse 11, "The man called Jesus made mud...". Then he calls Jesus a prophet (verse 17). Finally, he confesses Jesus as the Son of Man, Messiah – and worships Him!

When we come to Jesus, He begins a process of taking away our blindness! Notice, I said Jesus "begins a process" of taking away our blindness – it's a process, a lifelong learning, and grasping of God's Truth. *Salvation is realizing we are blind, and letting Jesus begin to open our eyes!*

When I look at this story, it reminds me that the moral and spiritual blindness – there – is present today!

There's doubt, and unbelief. The blind man's neighbors and acquaintances couldn't believe their friend was healed. "It's just a guy that looks like him, they said!" They doubted the miracle. Unbelief, skepticism, a negativism towards Christians and the church, is the pervading atmosphere in our culture. A growing secularism. Skepticism towards the Bible. A greater number of people claiming no religious affiliation.

Sure, we can blame it on Christians and the church, for our shortcomings. But, Christians and the church have always been flawed, imperfect. The sad thing is, many reject the Bible without even reading it. Many ignore or dismiss Jesus, in spite of the fact that 2,000 years has not diminished His power to change lives and situations even today. *We don't have to be part of the unbelief and skepticism blinding many today!*

There are other ways we can be "blind". *We can be chained to a religion of rules and regulations, just like the Pharisees.* It's incredible, isn't it! Here is a man blind from birth, and now he can see! And the *most religious people* in the story focus on one thing: Jesus broke their Sabbath rules and regulations. In spite of the gracious deed Jesus performed, He's a bad person! Some people's religion today is just a matter of keeping rules. A system of do's and don'ts. Some of the most religious people in the world can be some of the meanest, unkind people you'd ever meet! Jesus summed up the whole law and commandments, the essence of our faith, by saying it's loving God with our whole heart, and loving our neighbor as ourself. Being a Christian is having a relationship with Jesus Christ that moves us to love God and love others. If that's not what our faith is about, then we're blind.

Then there's the blindness of just not seeing the blessings right before us. If some Sunday morning in our healing service we prayed for a blind person to be healed in the name of Jesus, and that person was instantly healed and could see, don't you think there'd be a party atmosphere, of awe and joy and gratitude? But in this story, there's only grumbling and dissension. An amazing miracle took place right in front of their eyes, and they were blind to it. Think of the miracles and the blessings that we witness today! Healing miracles take place every day in our hospitals and medical centers. Heart bypass surgery. Knee replacements. Hip replacements. Cataract surgery. Incredible life-saving miracles!

Think of the blessings we have here in the United States. And yet, how many people complain about how bad our country is. I'm reading a book written by a man who was hugely successful in business, made tons of money, and now he and his wife are helping to run a Christian school in Uganda. And all of the luxuries and amenities that he knew here in this country are gone. It reminds me of my trips to Kenya. I wish everyone who complains about how bad our country is would be made to go to Kenya and live there for 6 months. We are so blessed here! God save us from being blind to the blessings and miracles right before our eyes!

Of course, the greatest blessing, and the greatest miracle, is Jesus. I love what the blind man said, I don't know whether this man Jesus is a sinner or not, but "one thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see" (John 9:25). Jesus came as the light of the world to take away our blindness!

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