



WHEN FAITH BECOMES SIGHT

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INTRO:

Our eyesight is precious, and we can take it for granted. Many do not, however. About 50,000 people lose their vision every year in the US. Losing one's senses of sight is one of the most fearful prospects we can contemplate. We notice immediately when our sight begins to degrade with age or infirmity. Seeing, having one's eyes opened, is a major theme in John, ch. 9.

MAIN TEXT:

"As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

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

After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means "Sent"). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" Some claimed that he was.

Others said, "No, he only looks like him."

But he himself insisted, "I am the man."

"How then were your eyes opened?" they asked.

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."

"Where is this man?" they asked him.

"I don't know," he said.

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. 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. "Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath."

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

They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. "Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?"

"We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind. 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." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God by telling the truth," they said. "We know this man is a sinner."

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!"

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

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?"

Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from."

The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

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

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

"Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you."

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

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

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

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

NOTES ON THE TEXT:

- This story involves a man who was born blind. He never saw, never enjoyed the gift of sight or the memories of color, shape, and texture associated with eyesight. His experience of the world was limited to the other four senses, sound, smells, etc. Sight and brain development are linked. People who have their sight restored through cataract surgery, for example, often cannot adjust if they've been without sight for a long time. The sensory input overwhelms their brain, and so assaults their sensibilities that they often impose blindness on themselves again by wearing an eye shade, for example.
This is the first instance of sight restored to one born blind. Though Jesus performed many miracles where he restored sight to the blind this is the first instance of sight restored to one born blind. The man's healing is a metaphor for the restoration of spiritual sight, but it is also an acknowledgment of judgment (9:39-41)
- The story begins with a question. The disciples think they're asking the "right" question. It seemed logical to them that sin in someone's life was the cause of man's blindness. Jesus' reply challenges their assumptions. Though there is brokenness and darkness in the world, he is light (v4) and has come to give light to all (John 1:4). God is up to something more than simple doling punishment out for sin.
- Jesus begins to effect the healing (v6) by combining something of his own Person with the creation. Jesus' spit plus dirt made the mud he used to place a poultice on the man's eyes). The mechanics of the healing are significant. Unless Jesus imparts something of his divine self to us, we remain blind. Broken creation must be united with divine life in order to be freed from the Curse (Gen. 3, Romans 8:20-21). This act of union is linked to a theme of life in the Son that permeates John's Gospel (John 1:4; 3:15-16, 36; 4:14; 5:21, 24, 26; 6:33, 35, 40, 47-48; 10:10, 28; 11:25; 14:6; 17:2-3; 20:31).
- The place of the healing is also significant. Siloam was often referred to as the Messiah's Pool, so as the man follow Jesus' instruction to wash in the pool, he was symbolically washing in the Messiah, by obedience to his Word. This foreshadows the sanctification that Jesus mentions in John 17:6, 14, and 17. Sanctification is often symbolized by a washing, or baptism—an immersion in water that signifies being set apart for God.
- After the man's healing, he goes home and his neighbors can't believe it's him at first. They ask how he was healed and he answers with the story of his encounter with Jesus (v10-11) This begins a rhythm in the narrative where the man is questioned about the miracle and he responds by repeatedly telling the story of his healing, first to his neighbors and then to the religious rulers in the Sanhedrin.
- Since the healing took place on the Sabbath, law-breaking becomes an issue. The way God's Law was observed in Jesus' day created a God-box, making God manageable. Those skeptical of Jesus, including the religious

authorities, continually say, “we know...” (There’s repetition in the text. The phrase appears five times in the span of 10 verses). That certainty is based on a confidence in their ability to “see” well, whether observing and interpreting reality, or understanding God’s revelation of himself. Jesus blows up their God-box. There’s an unmistakable miracle that upsets their theology *and* challenges their pre-conceptions of Jesus (Those who believed in him would be put out of the synagogue). At the conclusion of their interrogation of the man, the religious leaders put him out of fellowship.

- There’s a lot of misunderstanding and bad theology throughout the balance of the narrative after the man is healed. Much of the conversation assumes a quid pro quo. If we’re good, God blesses us. If we sin, he curses us. That theology puts our fate in our hands. We control the outcomes through our observance of God’s Law. Though his physical sight was restored, spirit sight it still lacking in the man
- Jesus finds the man again. He seeks him out. Jesus is still good at finding blind people and opening their eyes. :-) Jesus then begins to work on the man’s spiritual sight by anchoring the enthusiasm and energy of the moment in himself. He explicitly reveals himself to the man in an unmistakable manner at the end of the chapter—after all has passed—and the man believes and worships him.
- This sign, of seven signs around which John constructs his Gospel, teaches us that Jesus came into the world to do two things:
 1. Open blind eyes so they can truly see him.
 2. Confront those who are blind, but think they can see.

John’s point? Messiah has come ushering in a new era of clear-eyed sight, and a new relationship with God!

CONCLUSIONS:

Jesus sees the blind and cares for them.

The man born blind was of little concern to anyone but Jesus. The disciples didn’t really see the man. They only saw a theological question, and asked it thoughtlessly in front of him. Jesus saw not just the man’s condition, but the man himself.

Jesus is the promised Messiah. .

Scripture could not be clearer. Messiah brings sight to those who realize they are blind. And judgment to those who believe they can see apart from him. The “we know...” statements in the body of the narrative indicate the blindness of pride. Jesus response? Apart from him, they can’t handle seeing, just like a cataract patient with decades of sightlessness. The pride of “we know...” leads ultimately to judgment. It’s a trap.

“Then the eyes of the BLIND shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.” (Isaiah 35:5-6)

“... would to open the eyes that are BLIND, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.” (Isaiah 42:7)

“Go and tell John what you hear and see: (and the first phrase out of Jesus mouth is) the BLIND receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.” (Matthew 11:4-5)

APPLICATION:

Whenever you struggle with the unexplainable (Jesus, his actions, and his claims), anchor to the undeniable—the Resurrection of Jesus. There will always be things that are difficult to reconcile like human suffering and a loving, omnipotent God. Those tensions are obvious and long-standing, but when Jesus took up his life gain in the Resurrection, he said, in effect, “Trust me, despite what you sometimes ‘see’.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How do you take your sight for granted, if you do?
2. Have you ever had an epiphany, a moment where you suddenly saw something you had never seen before? If so, what was that like?
3. What are the ways your pre-conceptions keep you from seeing things afresh? If you’ve been made aware of that, how did your awareness come about?

4. What do you think of the way Jesus reframed the disciples' question about the blind man?
5. What about Jesus' claim to be the light of the world. What does that mean?
How does that relate to Jesus' claims to be Messiah, relative to Isaiah's prophecy and Matthew's Gospel?
6. What do you think about the twin themes of blindness and seeing in John 9?
7. Why do you think John recorded the intense questioning of this man by the religious authorities, the Sanhedrin? What purpose does its inclusion serve as we seek to understand the passage?
8. What kind of "blindness" in the narrative is contrasted with the physical blindness suffered by the man born blind?
9. How do pride and spiritual blindness interact? Is it easier to see that in others rather than ourselves, and if so, what do we do about that?