

Sermon Series Four: Believe and Live
(The Gospel of John: Signs of the Messiah - 1:1-12:50)
John 9:1-12
A Blind Man's Testimony: Part One

There are few things more frightening than the prospect of going blind or the reality of being born blind. About 285 million people in the world are visually impaired. 39 million are blind and 246 million have severe or moderate visual impairment. A recent invention has provided some hope. The blind with retinal pigmentosa are able to see the light with a new bionic eye implant. This bionic eye device, the Argus II, is a spectacle mounted camera that sends visual information to electrodes in the eye. It is surely amazing what this technology can do. But with all our technology, it is still far less effective than what Jesus did with a little dirt and spit. Even the miracle of technology cannot hold a candle to the miracles of Jesus the Messiah.

Jesus has just declared himself to be the Light of the World. Through the healing of a man born blind from birth he illustrates one of the characteristics of the messianic kingdom when “the eyes of the blind will be opened” (Isaiah 35:5). As Isaiah 42:7 predicted the Messiah would do, Jesus gave sight to the blind on several occasions (Matthew 9:27 -28; 11:5; 12:22; 15:30 -31; 20:30 -34; 21:14; Mark 8:22 -25; Luke 4:18). **He wonderfully brought sight into their dark world. Jesus will also use this miracle as an occasion to address two issues:**

I. The Issue of the Relation of Sin to Suffering (9:1-4)

As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth.² And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”³ Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work.

The scene takes place with Christ probably walking along the area south of the temple at one of the two southern gates. It was here that the uncared for blind were reduced to begging. The temple area was a prime

location for beggars since the large crowds coming there to worship would be likely to give them alms. There Christ meets a man who had been blind from birth and this blind man's condition will create a theological dilemma in the minds of the disciples.

1. The Cause of Suffering

1) A Popular Misunderstanding

It was the popular Jewish opinion that blindness and other types of physical suffering came as the direct result of personal sin. Therefore this man was blind because of some sin he had committed or a sin his parents had committed. They even believed that children could sin while still in the womb. In short, this cause-and-effect relationship led many of the Jews to conclude that every bad effect has an identifiable sinful cause. It is true that suffering in general is a result of the fall of man. If sin had not entered the world there would be no suffering. It is also true that a specific illness can sometimes be the direct consequence of a specific sin such as sexually transmitted diseases or a baby's health may be affected by a their parent's smoking or substance abuse during pregnancy.

The disciples would also have been thinking of some Old Testament passages that seem to promise punishment on children for the sins of their parents. Exodus 20:5 says, *"for I the Lord your God am a jealous God; visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments."* But this passage and others must be balanced with still other passages that clearly state that the son will not be put to death for his father's sin or a father for his son's sin. Everyone will die for his own iniquity (Deuteronomy 24:16; Deuteronomy 31:29-30; Ezekiel 18:20).

So a closer examination of the Exodus passage shows us that it must be understood in that it applies only to "those who hate me." Further, it is best to understand this passage in a national or societal sense (national sins). The corrupting effect of a wicked generation does seep into subsequent generations.

2) Jesus's Correction

(1) The wrong understanding

Jesus exposes the error of the popular contemporary thinking. He makes it clear that there is not always a direct link between suffering and personal sin. There are a number of reasons for suffering. In this case, this man had been allowed to be born blind so that at this particular moment in his earthly life, Jesus might come upon him and cure him and that, as a result, God might receive glory. The suffering of this man would lead to an experience of grace that would never have been possible had he been born with normal sight. And the power of this miracle would turn people to Christ then - and now.

(2) The wrong conclusion

The disciples viewed the man's condition as an indication of divine displeasure, but Jesus saw it as an opportunity for divine grace. Their focus was backward, on analyzing how the blind man came to be in his condition. The Lord's concern was forward, and on putting God's power on display for the man's benefit. Further, the disciples did not look at the man as an object of mercy, but as a subject for theological discussion.

(3) The wrong urgency

It is much easier to discuss an abstract subject like sin than it is to minister to a concrete need in the life of a person. It is much easier to condemn and criticize than it is to be compassionate and come alongside to help. Jesus reminds them of the limited time he had to do God's appointed work in this world and which, by application, they and we also have in this world. There was a sense of urgency for Jesus to be the light in the darkness of this world. He would only be here for a short while and then he would be taken away from his disciples through death and his ascension. They would be overtaken temporarily by darkness and unable to work until the Holy Spirit fell upon them at Pentecost. Therefore they were to serve God with a sense of urgency making the most of their time because the days are evil. As Richard Baxter once wrote, "I preach as never to preach again, and as a dying man to dying men."

II. The Issue of the Relation of Physical Blindness to Spiritual Blindness (5:5-12)

⁵ *As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” 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. ⁸ The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” ⁹ Some said, “It is he.” Others said, “No, but he is like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” ¹⁰ So they said to him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” ¹¹ He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ So I went and washed and received my sight.” ¹² They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”*

***What is most interesting is that we are saved from our spiritual blindness in the same manner that this man was healed of his physical blindness. Once again Jesus is using a physical reality to picture a spiritual reality.

1. We were all blind “men” in the darkness of sin.

1) This blind man lived in hopeless depravation and suffering his entire lifetime. He could not see Jesus even when Jesus was standing right in front of him, but Jesus could see him. 2) It is also likely that the man did not really have an appreciation for sight since he had never known what it meant to see. “He didn’t know what he was missing.” He had not lived with sight and then lost it, and so he could not value it properly. 3) We do not notice him praying or seeking after sight. Or at least we are not told. 4) He had probably not planned to be, but he was in the place where Jesus was likely to go. Whether he had planned it or not, this is where Jesus would pass by and Jesus found him.

Does that not describe the place where we were all once spiritually? We lived as spiritual paupers and bore the suffering of the consequences of living a life of sin. We did not understand what it meant to be in a relationship with Jesus. We did not know what we were missing. We did not understand spiritual truths nor the value of living a godly life. For the most part, we were minding our own business, living to satisfy our own goals and plans. Oh we had read our Bibles a time or

two, and we had heard the gospel preached. But we did not understand what it said and we certainly did not know Jesus for who he really was. What is worse, we did not understand how bad our situation really was. We were living in the darkness of sin and had no capacity to recognize the Savior or to find him on our own.

2. Then we met Jesus.

Then we met the man Jesus. Jesus came to us. Now this man Jesus was not at all what we expected. And when he did his powerful work of giving us spiritual sight and spiritual life, we were not what people expected. We were profoundly changed to the point that even our best friends wondered if we were the same person. J. B. Phillips sensed this deeply as he did his great translation work. He remarked that he was not prepared for the *unconventional man* revealed in those terse Gospels. “No one could possibly have invented such a person: this was no puppet-hero built out of the imaginations of adoring admirers....”

When the blind man met Jesus, and was healed and profoundly changed by him, that was all he could talk about. In fact the change was so great that many thought it was a case of mistaken identity even though he kept saying, “I am the man.” Can you imagine how dismayed and shocked he was. And notice that his talk was all about Jesus. He said almost nothing about himself.

3. Jesus used the most humble means to save us.

The story tells us that Jesus “*spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man’s eyes with the mud*” The humble means in which Christ performed this miracle would’ve been offensive to some. It would seem coarse or undignified if not downright dirty. Would not the anointing of the blind man’s eyes with clay have hindered rather than provided his sight? Others would have seen it as totally inadequate and even foolish. Certainly the good news of the gospel today seems to many to be foolish. The way to meet the deep personal and social needs of men is through a doctor, surgeon, psychiatrist, politics, social action programs, and philanthropic endeavors. But certainly not Jesus! The gospel is coarse, bloody, old-fashioned, irrelevant, and beneath one’s dignity. For others the good news of the lavish grace of God seems to actually encourage sin and not to deter it.

But it is by humbling ourselves, and realizing our desperate need and absolute incapability of meeting God's perfect standards, by listening to the words of Jesus proclaimed in the gospel, that God takes a dirty vile heart and transforms it into a new creation. Where we were blind, we now can see! God's miraculous transformation of this man and us becomes a profound display of God's glory!

4. Jesus gives the simplest of commands to obey

“Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud and said to him, “Go wash in the pool of Siloam (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.” Obedience to seven words transformed this man from utter total blindness to full sightedness. The command was simple and personal. It involved a simple test of obedience. It is of great interest that John interprets the meaning of “Siloam” as “Sent.” Jesus had sent the blind man, he obeyed, and he received sight. Similarly all who obey Jesus' command to believe in him received spiritual sight. But it is also true that Christ is the one who was “sent” by God to live the perfect life we could not live and to die a fully satisfying death for us. The man's sight was restored by clay, made out of the ground with the spittle of the one who was sent by God. It was God who first breathed life into clay when he created Adam. And it is God through Christ, and the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit who would wash away this man's sin. Just as the Feast of Tabernacles was a time when water was drawn from this pool symbolizing the giving of new life by the Holy Spirit, water is again drawn from this pool symbolizing the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit at salvation where we are washed clean from every sin and are made whiter than snow. Where we were blind spiritually, now we can see.

Conclusion

When Pierre-Paul Thomas was growing up in Montreal, Canada in the 1940s he couldn't play hockey with his brothers and it broke his heart. Thomas was born blind—long before a cure was available. So for most of his life he could only imagine the world that people often described to him. For years he walked with a white cane to avoid obstacles in front of him. But at the age of sixty-six, Thomas fell down the stairs in an apartment building and fractured the bones of his face. He was rushed to

the hospital with severe swelling around his eyes. A team of doctors went to work to repair the bones. Months later he went to be examined by a plastic surgeon for a consultation about repairing his scalp. The surgeon casually asked Thomas, "Oh, while we're at it, do you want us to fix your eyes too?" Thomas did not understand. Nor did he know how to respond. Not long after that, Thomas had surgery and could truly see for the first time. Suddenly his world consisted of bright colors he had never fathomed before. He spoke of being awestruck by flowers blossoming and trees blooming. As beautiful as this story of a sixty-year-old man who was able to see for the first time is, there is a sad reality. He could have had the same surgery at a younger age and been able to see earlier. Thomas had assumed such a possibility was impossible and had resigned himself to a life of blindness when, in reality, he could have experienced the gift of sight decades earlier. So many today are doing the same thing. They walk around in darkness spiritually when their life could be totally changed and filled with hope and purpose. A whole new world lies within their grasp, but they refuse to obey and believe. And so they stumble on in their blindness when the Light of the World is offering them something many times better than what they already have. What a wonderful thing the Lord Jesus Christ did for this man! What a wonderful thing he's prepared to do for you if you will obey him. If you are hesitating, the blind man can be your guide. As an old Puritan preacher once observed, "the blind man obeyed Christ blindly." And as a result of his obedience he immediately received physical sight and entered upon a pathway by which he eventually received true spiritual sight in addition. If you only give your heart and life to Christ he will begin by giving you spiritual sight and will ultimately make all things new!