



Text: John 9:1-41¹

Series: *Life in His Name* – The Message of John’s Gospel

Title: Part 22 -- “Believing Is Seeing”

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Someone once said,

“There is none so blind as he who will not see.”

Sounds Biblical, doesn’t it? But strictly speaking, it isn’t. It was probably coined by Jonathan Swift, the eighteenth-century English author who, among other literary works, penned *Gulliver’s Travels*. But Swift was working with Biblical materials when he wrote this little piece of popular wisdom. The problem of the blindness of the heart and mind was recognized by the writers in both the Old and New Testaments. For example, the prophet Jeremiah rebuked the tendency of God’s people to fail to grasp the meaning of God’s Word to them, saying...

“Hear this, O foolish and senseless people, who have eyes, but see not, who have ears, but hear not.” Jeremiah 5:21

Jesus picked up on this language of “seeing but not seeing” in his explanation of his use of parables in his teaching. Parables are often challenging and hard to understand, requiring diligent searching out if they are to be properly understood. Only those whose spiritual perceptions are keen will understand them while those who are spiritually dull will not hear the message of the parable. Jesus said...

“This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.” Matthew 13:13

And in our passage today, Jesus returned to the theme of spiritual blindness, of “seeing without seeing.” He declared that the message he brought was one which had the same effect as that brought by the Old Testament prophets. Jesus’ message would divide people into one of two groups; we are either among the seeing who perceive or among the blind who do not understand. Jesus said...

“For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.” John 9:38

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When Jesus spoke about “seeing” he was referring to more than physical sight. To “see” on Jesus’ terms is to understand and perceive the importance and significance of the message that he brought. To “see” is ultimately to “see Jesus” for who he really is and to believe in him. If we’re going to grasp who Jesus really is, then we need to understand that...

“Believing Is Seeing”

As we walk through this story today, I want you to watch for the growing insight into the person of Jesus that John wove throughout the dialogue of this story. It’s as if our eyes become increasingly attuned to the light of Jesus’ glory and we’re enabled to see greater and greater truth about him. John invites us to expand our perception and to see Jesus, that is, unless we’re blind and we can’t see him.

Some years ago I was attending the Southern Gospel music celebration in Red Deer. The MC that year was speaking in the gap between two of the groups, making a bridge as the stage was being reset for the next Gospel team. He was trying to keep things moving along and he said, “If you haven’t heard the Gospel in the songs being sung tonight...” and then he paused, as if searching for the right words, “well, then,” he said, “there’s something wrong with you.” He was right. It might not have been quite the right thing to say, but he was right. When we can’t “see” Jesus, when we can’t “hear” Jesus, it’s because we’re spiritually blind and deaf. Until Jesus opens our eyes as he did for the man in our story today, we are spiritually stone blind and spiritually stone deaf. I hope that that isn’t true of anyone here this morning, but it might well be. If it is, please know that the reason you don’t “get” Jesus is because you can’t unless he opens your eyes. You need to come to him and say, “Jesus, help me to see you. I don’t understand who you are, but I want to. Enable me to see you, to understand you so that I can believe in you.” And those us who already are believers in Jesus, we are still dependent upon him to enable us to see his truth. As the old chorus put it...

**“Open our eyes, Lord, we want to see Jesus
To reach out and touch him and say what we love him
Open our ears, Lord, and help us to listen.
Open our eyes, Lord, we want to see Jesus.”**

And as the new chorus has it...

**“Open the eyes of my heart, Lord, open the eyes of my heart
I want to see You, I want to see You”**

So, let’s see what Jesus shows us today in his Word, shall we? I’m reading from John’s Gospel, chapter nine, beginning in verse one. This is God’s holy, inspired and authoritative Word.



¹ As [Jesus] 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. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” ⁶ Having said these things, he spat 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.

The disciples were a product of their religious environment. The religious teachers of their day believed that birth defects were the product of sin, either sin committed by the parents, or sin committed by the infant in the womb. Jesus clearly rejected both views. He refused to enter into the “blame game” but shifted the focus immediately to the grace of God. This needy, blind man was someone who needed God to work in his life. This man’s need was great, but God’s grace for him was even greater! This man’s condition created a canvas upon which “the works of God might be displayed in him.”

In John’s Gospel, the phrase, “the works of God” has a very specific meaning. It refers to wonderful “signs” or miracles that point people to Jesus. Jesus was asked one day by a group of people who were following him...

“What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” John 6:28

Jesus answered them...

“This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” John 6:29

The essential “work of God” is to believe in Jesus and “the works” that Jesus did were designed to move people to believe in him. Jesus said...

“Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.” John 14:11

So when Jesus said that this man’s congenital blindness created an opportunity for the display of God’s works, he was telling his disciples that something was about to happen that would point people to faith in Him. The question that helps us unlock the meaning of this story is this...

How does God work in this man’s life to bring people to see Jesus?

But the question that unlocks how this story touches our lives is this...



How is God working in my life to bring people to see Jesus?

As we walk through this story together we need to be asking ourselves this question. In the early church this story was taught as part of the preparation for baptism. What we'll see is the story of a man who stands with Jesus despite incredible opposition and as people were prepared for baptism this story helped to prepare them for the challenge of being followers of Jesus in a world that rejected Him. This story prepares us to live as followers of Jesus in a world that still rejects him and those who believe in him. Let's see what Jesus says to us today through his work in this blind man's life 2000 years ago.

First of all, let's look at the most obvious "work of God" ... the healing of the man born blind.

God worked in this man's life so that people could see that Jesus is the Son of God who gives life!

If you survey the healing miracles of Jesus you'll find that he healed more blind people than any other physical ailment. Why? Blindness may well have been a serious health issue in Jesus' day but I think there's a more Biblically based reason for his focus on the blind. The healing of physical blindness pointed to the healing of spiritual blindness.

In several places in his prophecy, the prophet Isaiah declared that the work of the coming Messiah was to open the eyes of the blind. One of the best examples is one that Jesus chose to highlight. One day when Jesus was asked to read the Scripture in the synagogue in his home town, he chose this reading from the sixty-first chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah...

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Luke 4:18-19 (quoting Isaiah 61:1-2)

When Jesus gave this blind man his sight he gave him a tremendous gift. The blind had no social safety net to catch them in that culture. There was no CNIB to support them. They were reduced to begging on the street, as this man had been. Their lives were desperate, shut off from society. When Jesus gave "light" to this man's eyes he also gave him life. "Light" in John's Gospel points to "life." John told us that at the very beginning of the Gospel when he said about Jesus ...

"In him was life, and the life was the light of men." John 1:4



In giving this man his sight Jesus gave him life but he was also making a statement. He was declaring, "I'm the One spoken of by the prophet Isaiah. I'm the anointed of the Lord. I'm the Sent One from God." Did you notice that John translated the name of the pool for us? "Siloam," he told us, means "Sent." Jesus was the "Sent One" and in the healing of this man he was sending a message.

But there's more imbedded in this story. The way in which Jesus healed this man is fascinating. At other times, he simply spoke and the blind were healed. Sometimes he touched them and they were healed. Other times he spit on their eyes and they were healed. This is the only time where he made mud and anointed the eyes. Bible scholars have long wondered at the significance of this act. Why did Jesus heal this man in this way?

This is the only example in the entire Bible of a person who was born blind being healed of blindness. And one of the suggestions about why Jesus used mud in this man's situation is intriguing. When God created mankind the Book of Genesis tells us that...

"the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground..." Genesis 2:7

Jesus, stooped down, formed the dust of the ground into mud and gave this man working eyes he had never had before. Who can do that? Who can make eyes? Who give us vocal cords with which to speak? Who structures the inner ear to enable us to hear? When Moses complained that he was unable to speak God's message to the Egyptian Pharaoh because he was "slow of speech and of tongue" (Ex 4:10), the Lord reminded him...

"Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?" Exodus 4:11

Let me remind us that Jesus has just declared to his opponents...

"...before Abraham was, I am." John 8:58

God had declared himself to Moses to be ...

"I Am Who I Am" Exodus 3:14

Imbedded in this healing is a message from Jesus. Do you hear it? Do you see it? Jesus declares...

**"I am" God come in the flesh
"I am the light of the world" John 9:5 (8:12)
"I am the bread of life" John 6:35**



Jesus was declaring through this man: “If you want life, come to me. I have the power to touch you and give you what you have never had before ... eternal, never-ending life! I can do a work of new creation in you. Let me touch your life and just see what I will do in you.” This man was a walking billboard declaring the glory of Jesus Christ as “the light of the world,” the source of life for all those who would believe in him.

How did people respond to the message imbedded in this man’s life? How did God work through this man to point people to Jesus? **Secondly...**

God worked through this man to draw his neighbors to see Jesus

For his entire life, this man had only been able to grope his way from wherever he lived to the street where he begged and back again. That was his life. Now, he walked home. That’s all he did! He just walked home and people were amazed! He didn’t need to say a word ... his changed life spoke volumes.

“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?” Some said, “It is he.” Others said, “No, but he is like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.”

John 9:8-9

Some lives speak volumes. When I was a teenager my family attended a church in the summer near our cottage. One summer the preacher was a seminary student. He had been born without arms. He was one of those babies whose mother’s had taken the drug Thalidomide during her pregnancy. He was born with small, deformed hands and arms. And I can still see him in my mind’s eye as he bent forward to turn the pages of his Bible with those deformed limbs, while he preached the goodness and grace of God. Why wasn’t this man bitter and angry at God? What act of grace had God done in his life to bring him to faith in God and to preach God’s grace? His life begged those questions.

The blind man’s life begged the question that eventually came...

“So they said to him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” 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.” They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.” John 9:10-12

He didn’t know where Jesus was. He’d never seen him! He’d only heard his voice and felt his touch and been healed but he faithfully recounted everything he did know about Jesus. At this point, he thought of him as “the man called Jesus.” That’s all he knew at this point but he was faithful to share what he knew. But that was enough to inspire his neighbors to want to know more.



His neighbors asked, “Where is he?” because they wanted to see Jesus themselves.

Our lives are to reflect that we have been touched by “the light of the world” and through that to draw people to want to know more about Jesus. How has God changed our lives so that our lives speak about Jesus? How does Jesus’ light shine in our lives? How is his life seen in our lives? Jesus said to us...

“You are the light of the world ... let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” Matthew 5:14, 16

These people had questions about Jesus and what he’d done for this man so they took him to the people who gave them spiritual guidance. But sadly, these spiritual leaders had already determined that they hated Jesus. I don’t think we can blame the man’s neighbors for what happened next but **thirdly**,

God worked through this man to challenge the religious to see Jesus and abandon their religion

John tells us...

“Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 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.” 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.” John 9:14-16

You can search the Old Testament over and you will not find a single prohibition on healing on the Sabbath day. That’s was not God’s Law, that was man’s law. The Pharisees had constructed a religion out of God’s Law that progressively, generation after generation, veered away from God’s Word. The Rabbis of Jesus’ day had set a rule that healing was forbidden on the Sabbath day, except in cases where life itself was in danger, which wasn’t the case with this man. So “some” of the Pharisees decided that Jesus could not be from God because “he does not keep the Sabbath.” They were fixated on their rules and Jesus didn’t keep their rules. They were fixated on **how** Jesus acted.

But there were some others, who wondered. This healing was so remarkable that it made them wonder **who** Jesus was. Was he a Sabbath-breaking sinner? How could someone like that do what Jesus had done for this man? This Jesus who gave sight to the eyes of a man born blind seemed to be like the God who they tried to honour with their rules. They knew their Bibles as well as their rule book and the Bible talked about God giving sight to the blind. Could Jesus be



from God? The life that pulsed in this man spoke to them of a life they had never seen in their rules.

These wondering Pharisees wanted to know about Jesus so they asked the man...

“What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?’ He said, ‘He is a prophet.’” John 9:17

Jesus has grown in the blind man’s understanding from “the man called Jesus” to “a prophet” of God. That’s what happens in a relationship with a living person. We grow in our knowledge and experience of the other person and already this man’s knowledge of Jesus was growing and dynamic.

Religion is all about “how” questions. Christianity is all about “who” questions: “Who is Jesus Christ? What does it mean to follow him?” The Christian faith is about living out a relationship with Jesus Christ. Religion turns that relationship into rules and kills it. And it can happen to those who believe in Jesus just as it happened to the Pharisees. Is our Christianity a religion of static rules or a ongoing relationship with the living Jesus Christ?

Fourthly,

God worked in this man’s life to challenge his family to see Jesus and to stand with him

The religious Pharisees did not want to admit the fact of this man’s healing, it was simply too potent an argument for Jesus. So they tried to discount the man’s story by claiming that he hadn’t been born blind at all.

“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 and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” His parents answered, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. 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.” (His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.)” John 9:18-22

The religious Pharisees were desperate to avoid the power and truth of what Jesus had done in this man’s life! They hoped that the man’s parents would provide some alternative explanation to the obvious fact of his healing. But they couldn’t offer an alternative, nor would they acknowledge the power and truth of what had happened to their own son. Instead, his parents left him to stand on his own. They hung him out to dry. They deserted him. They didn’t want to risk



social exclusion for the sake of their son, let alone for the sake of Jesus. They would not “confess Jesus to be Christ” or even allow the idea to be attached to them.

That must have hurt that man. Those of you who have families that mock your faith in Christ will know his pain. They abandoned him; but he would not abandon Jesus. This man’s family gave living illustration of Jesus words about the price that following Jesus can sometimes exact from us. Jesus said...

“For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.” Matthew 10:35-38

In the **fifth** place,

God worked in this man’s life to enable him to stand with Jesus in the face of relentless hostility

Unsatisfied with the answers he gave in his first appearance before them the religious Pharisees hauled him into their court a second time and subjected him to a barrage of questions. As wonderful as this man’s healing was and as astonishing a work of God’s grace as it was, the record of this man’s courageous stand in the face of the attack he endured from the Pharisees is, for me, truly awe-inspiring! When we face opposition because of our faith, the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews counsels us to look to Jesus’ example in the face of persecution and draw our strength from him. He wrote...

“Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.” Hebrews 12:3

Jesus is our ultimate inspirational example, but I think that this man’s courage is also tremendously inspiring.

He stood with Jesus in the face of intimidation

The Pharisees said to him...

“Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner.” He answered, “Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” John 9:24-25

“We know....” In other words, “we, your religious leaders, have already decided the matter and we expect you to agree with us!” But the man refused to crack.



This man had no visible means of support. He was a beggar without financial power. His family had abandoned him to the wolves. His religious leaders were demanding his submission. But he stood with Jesus! It was as if he were saying to them: "I don't know if he's a sinner, but I can see! Can't you?"

He stood with Jesus in the face of intimidation ... how? Why? What gave him the strength?

He stood with Jesus in the face of interrogation

"They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' He answered them, 'I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?'"

John 9:26-27

They tried to rattle him by demanding that he re-tell his story, probably hoping that some little inconsistency would give them an angle of attack. But he didn't crack! He had already told them his story. He'd already answered their questions. Instead of being broken by their relentless assault, he demonstrated an audacious courage that can only be described with the Yiddish word, "*chutzpah*." A Jewish writer defined *chutzpah* as "that quality enshrined in a man who, having killed his mother and father, throws himself on the mercy of the court because he is an orphan."²

But this man's taunt, as gutsy as it was, gave his attackers an angle. Did you notice it? It's in the word, "also." Up to know he's only reported what happened, who did it and what he thought of him. But here he identifies himself with Jesus' disciples and the attack heats up!

He stood with Jesus in the face of confrontation

The Pharisees launched their attack...

"And 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.' The man answered, 'Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. 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. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.'" John 9:28-33

The sides are drawn up. This man was either with the Pharisees or with Jesus, and he chose Jesus. And he declares clearly that he believes that his healing

² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chutzpah>



demonstrates that Jesus is “from God” (v.33), a further deepening of his understanding about Jesus.

And finally,

He stood with Jesus in the face of rejection

**“They answered him, ‘You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?’
And they cast him out.” John 9:34**

How was he able to stand against all this? There is no human reason. The only sufficient reason is that God was doing a work in him to enable him to stand for Jesus Christ. Jesus told his disciples that they should expect persecution for their faith but that they should worry about it. He said...

“when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.” Luke 12:11-12

Finally,

God worked in this man’s life to lead him to see and believe in Jesus

**“Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’ He answered, ‘And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.’ He said, ‘Lord, I believe,’ and he worshiped him.”
John 9:35-38**

After all was said and done, the most important words that needed to come out of his mouth were those words: “Lord, I believe.” Everything that God had done in this man’s life was intended to bring him to his crucial moment, this moment of faith and declaration. If his healing had not led him to this declaration then it would have resulted in nothing of eternal value for him. John wrote his Gospel...

“so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” John 20:31

In this story of a man healed of blindness titles for Jesus spill over each other, each one of them inviting us to believe in **Jesus...**

**“The light of the world” (John 9:5)
The One “Sent” from God (John 9:7, 16)
The “prophet” (John 9:17)
The “Christ” (John 9:22)**



**“the Son of Man” (John 9:35)
“Lord” (John 9:38)**

Do you believe? Do you see him?
If you do, then I invite you to worship him!
If you don't, then I invite you to ask God to give you sight.

**“Open our eyes, Lord, we want to see Jesus
To reach out and touch him and say what we love him
Open our ears, Lord, and help us to listen.
Open our eyes, Lord, we want to see Jesus.”**

- **The Table of the Lord**
- **Songs of Communion:**
 - Alas, and Did My Saviour Bleed
 - I Have Decided to Follow Jesus
- **Benediction**