

**+ John 9:1-7,13-17,34-39 + I Was Blind, But Now I See + 3rd Sunday in Lent + 23 March 2014 +**

The man had never seen the light of day. He had never seen the sun shine or the stars twinkle. He had never seen the faces of his parents or friends. In darkness he was formed and was born. In darkness he passed from infancy to childhood to adulthood. From birth this man was blind. Every morning he was led to a place along the road near Jerusalem to beg.

When he awoke that Saturday morning, he figured it would be just another Sabbath—a day of rest, but like any other. He was helped out to his regular spot and he listened for passers-by to provide some spare change. Most ignored him and kept walking, but one man noticed the blind beggar. It seemed there was a small crowd around this man, who apparently was a rabbi or teacher named Jesus. One of the man's disciples asked, ***“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”***

The blind beggar wasn't offended since he heard that often. In fact, when things got really bad, he even asked the same question himself. What great sin had he or his parents committed that he had to endure this lifelong blindness? Could it be possible that his parents did something they never told him about? Why was God so harsh to make him suffer like that? Jesus' disciples wondered the same thing, so they asked this Jesus for an answer.

The blind beggar was surprised at the answer he heard. The teacher spoke with an authority and wisdom the blind man had never heard before. ***“Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. As long as it is day, we must do the work 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.”*** The blind man wondered at what Jesus had said. ***“...This happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life...I am the light of the world.”*** What did the teacher mean and what was he going to do?

Jesus crossed over to the blind man. He could hear Jesus spit on the ground—not the most pleasant sound—but then, he heard the rubbing of a hand or foot on wet dirt. Then something very unusual happened. The man could feel wet mud being packed over his blind eyes. The darkness became darker. He heard the much closer voice of the teacher give him a single command, ***“Go, wash in the Pool of Siloam.”***

The blind man was familiar with that Pool in Jerusalem. Many thought its waters had some kind of healing power since water flowed into it from a spring high atop the Temple Mount. He wasn't so sure about that, but without a question, he went anyway. With help from a friend, he made it to the Pool and bent down to wash the mud off his eyes. As he scrubbed the mud off, light began to appear and the more he washed the clearer the light became. With water streaming down his face, the man was suddenly able to see for the first time in his life. The darkness had ended. He hurried back to tell his loved ones of the amazing miracle that had just taken place. He knew it wasn't the water. It was Jesus! ***“I was blind, but now I see!”***

None of us here have been blind since birth. You may not know blindness, but like the blind man, you do know suffering. You know pain and grief, fear and worry. You know difficulty and hardship and depression. You know sin. You know temptation and guilt and consequences that cause pain and grief and hardship. The disciples' question sounds awfully familiar. “Whose sin caused this suffering? Someone must've done something to deserve it.” Such thoughts blind many people, including you and me.

Often in the midst of suffering or when faced with a loved one's suffering, we, too, can be blinded to the fact that God often allows suffering to take place to display his glory and blessing. Here the Lord cuts through our blind misperceptions about sin and suffering. The man didn't endure a lifetime of blindness because he or his parents had sinned. Yes, sin has consequences like pain or hardship, but even then, the Lord uses those “bad things” to display his glory and blessing in our lives. You see, he doesn't punish us as our sins deserve, but punished Jesus for them once for all. There is no punishment left for us to suffer, so we see this ***“work of God”*** displayed in our lives. Yes, Jesus healed the man, but more importantly, Jesus came to heal the man's spiritual blindness and ours too.

***“I was blind, but now I see!”*** He was seeing their faces for the first time. The former blind man told everyone he knew about this miracle that had just taken place. Oddly those who knew him couldn't believe that it was actually him. ***“Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?” “...No, he only looks like him.” “I am the man!”*** (John 9:8-9) Soon the questions of “How?” and “Who?” needed to be answered. When the man left for the Pool of Siloam, Jesus had moved on. The healed man repeated the account of his healing, but didn't know who this Jesus was who had healed him.

This miracle—a man blind from birth now with perfect vision—seemed so impossible that some of his neighbors took him to the Pharisees to get an explanation. The Pharisees were the religious leaders of the people and in a good position to explain such a miracle. Sadly, they proved to be even blinder than this man once was because of their unbelief.

The Pharisees started squabbling over Jesus. ***“This [Jesus] is not from God, because he broke the Sabbath”*** ***“...How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?”*** By their own man-made laws, they had determined Jesus was a sinner because he had “worked” on the Sabbath. Apparently, making mud out of saliva and dirt was considered “work”. Therefore, Jesus had to be a “sinner”, but how could he heal if he wasn’t from God?

***“What have you to say about him?”*** The man hadn’t seen Jesus, but he did know the One who had healed him could only come from God. By faith, he confessed, ***“He is a prophet.”*** This statement only infuriated the Pharisees more. They summoned his parents to prove he was blind from birth—which he was. They tried to get him to declare Jesus a sinner under oath, but the man confessed even more boldly, ***“Whether he is a sinner or not, I do not know. One thing I do know. I was blind, but now I see!”*** (John 9:25)

The Pharisees demanded again that the man explain what happened. In simple faith, he said, ***“I have told you already and you did not listen...Do you want to become his disciples too?”*** (John 9:27) As the Pharisees foamed with blind rage and unbelief, the Lord made the man stronger and bolder. ***“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 man 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.”*** (John 9:30-33) In blindness, the Pharisees claimed the man was ***“steeped in sin at birth”*** and physically threw him out.

***“I was blind, but now I see!”*** Unbelievable, isn’t it? Those Pharisees were so arrogant and unbelieving and holier-than-thou, weren’t they? How hard they tried to discredit this man’s testimony of truth about Jesus! Yet before we pat ourselves on the back for not being “as bad as them”, you and I need to take a closer look at our own lives.

Have you ever acted like a Pharisee? Have you ever shown such blind pride or arrogance or a holier-than-thou attitude? Have you ever let your sinful nature blind you to the truth of God’s Word? Have you ever been blinded with anger because of something God’s Word told you that you didn’t want to hear? Before God, we must confess those times when we have become Pharisees and have rejected the clear truth of his Word.

By God’s grace through faith, the clear light of God’s truth shines into our hearts and brings us forgiveness through Jesus for our unbelief and arrogance. The light of God’s Word clears our spiritual sight and moves us to boldly testify to what that Word has to say. This is only possible because Christ has healed us spiritually and opened our eyes to see.

***“I was blind, but now I see!”*** Jesus intentionally sought out the man to give him completely clear sight—not for his eyes, but for his soul. Jesus didn’t come to him to get him to simply say, “I believe in you”. The Lord had already planted faith in the man’s heart, but Jesus returned to bring the man to the full knowledge of the truth.

***“Do you believe in the Son of Man?”*** Jesus wanted this man to realize that the One who spoke to him was the promised Messiah—the One who had come to rescue mankind from the blindness of sin and unbelief. The man replied, ***“Who is he, Sir, that I may believe in him?”*** By faith, this man trusted that Jesus would give him the right answer. ***“You have both seen him and he is the one now talking with you.”*** By faith, this man’s spiritual sight was now totally clear. He beheld his Savior with his own eyes—the very Savior who had lived perfectly up to this time and who would soon make his way to Jerusalem to sacrifice himself for the sins of the whole world, including this man and even the Pharisees. The man responded, ***“Lord, I believe”*** and worshiped at Jesus’ feet a clear-sighted child of God.

Jesus’ final statement seems cryptic, but really explains all this. ***“For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.”*** This former blind man now had perfect spiritual vision. By faith, he knew exactly who his Savior was—Jesus Christ, the very One who in mercy had healed the man of his physical ailment and healed his sin-blinded soul. Unlike him, however, those who claimed to see without Jesus’ help only showed how blind they really were in unbelief.

***“I was blind, but now I see!”*** By nature, we, too, are spiritually blind, but Jesus clears away the blindness through faith in him. Christ gives you perfect spiritual sight focused on what he alone has done for you—living a life free of sin’s blindness in your place, allowing himself to be snuffed out to remove your blindness forever,

and opening your eyes with the clear light of his resurrection. Christ gives you spiritual sight, so you can see your Savior.

***“I was blind, but now I see!”*** What an awesome miracle the Lord performed in healing the blind man! What an awesome miracle the Lord performs in us to bring us spiritual sight! What an awesome privilege to be able to say with the blind man, ***“I was blind, but now I see!”*** Amen.