

John 9 / COB / 08.31.14

Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: Card]** This is the card my sister sent me; inside it said the miracle was that she had written.
 - You will notice that I have asked volunteers hand out one bandana to every person. Anyone still need one? Here is what I would like you to do. Fold the bandana into a triangle, now roll it up, and tie it so it covers your eyes. For the next few minutes, you will not be able to see, and then we will all take the bandanas off together. You don't have to do this if it makes you uncomfortable, but it is a an interesting illustration.

- † What if you had been born blind? My seminary put together a book to go with a course they were teaching, called *Why O God?: Suffering and Disability in the Bible and the Church*. When I read it years ago, I was eager to learn how to minister to those with disabilities or other forms of suffering.
 - I was surprised by the first chapter, in which Joni Eareckson Tada strongly states that it would be better to consider how those with disabilities are equipped to minister to those without! She argued that suffering well is one way we can glorify God, that suffering often opens us up to receive more of God, and that God often uses disabilities to better reveal himself to others.
 - That gave me a new perspective to consider, and – along with such scriptural teachings as we went through last year in 1 Peter – it has helped to change my own perspective on suffering.

- † What if you had been born blind? What if you had been born blind and your family lived in a big city, like Philadelphia, and you never learned braille or any marketable skills, so you were sitting on a street corner, begging? How frightening would that be? How uncomfortable would that be? How boring? Now what if suddenly you were healed and could see?! How would you respond to the person who miraculously healed you?
 - We are all born blind in the spiritual sense. We are born with a corrupted human nature and a separation from God, which causes us to walk in spiritual darkness, unable to see the truth about God or righteousness. But Jesus can miraculously heal us of this blindness, he can open our eyes to see the truth, empower us to choose righteousness and faith, and allow us to walk in the light of true spiritual life with God.

- † You can take your bandannas off now. I was going to have you wear them during the sermon, but LeeAnn pointed out the risk that many of you would find sleep irresistible that way.
 - I need my volunteers to help me again. I would like for you to read along with me today. I have procured some New English Translation Bibles, and if couples would share one, then we probably have enough to go around. When you get one, please turn with me to John 9. I want to tell you a story...

[Slide 2: blind man] John 9.1- NET: Now as Jesus was passing by, he saw a man who had been blind from birth.

† In John 8, we saw Jesus teaching in the Temple courts about being the light of the world and the divine Son of God. Not long after this, Jesus was still in Jerusalem when he saw this man who had been blind from birth.

John 9.2: His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who committed the sin that caused him to be born blind, this man or his parents?”

† It was a common belief in their culture that all suffering was caused by someone’s specific act of sin, so the disciples wondered whether the parents had sinned so that their child was born blind or whether the man had somehow sinned in the womb.

John 9.3: Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but he was born blind so that the acts of God may be revealed through what happens to him.”

† The Bible says that acts of sin can cause physical health issues, but here we learn that not all physical health issues are the result of acts of sin. We live in a cursed world and we have corrupted human natures, both of which contribute to the suffering we experience.

† In this case, God allowed the man’s blindness to occur so that God could reveal himself through the man’s healing. So the man’s blindness was important to God’s plan to glorify himself and minister to others, something we should keep in mind when we are suffering.

- How many of you have suffered in life, any sort of suffering, grief for the loss of a loved one, physical pain, anxiety, stress, depression, a financial or career setback, any form of suffering?
- Now think about this. God allowed this man to be born blind so that God could reveal himself and bless others through his suffering. Is it possible that God wants to reveal himself, to shine his light, through our suffering today?

John 9.4-5: [Jesus still speaking] “We must perform the deeds of the one who sent me as long as it is daytime. Night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

† As the Messiah and unique Son who was sent by God the Father, Jesus is the light of the world. So while he was walking the earth, it was like daytime, an opportune time for Jesus and his disciples to work together to carry out his mission from God the Father. When Jesus died, there was darkness, and the disciples struggled to minister until Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to empower them.

[Slide 3: Pool] John 9.6-7: Having said this, he spat on the ground and made some mud with the saliva. He smeared the mud on the blind man's eyes and said to him, “Go wash in the pool of Siloam” (which is translated “sent”). So the blind man went away and washed, and came back seeing.

† It amuses me that the Greek verb for “I spit” is πτύω. I don’t know why Jesus decided to spit and create mud for this miracle. The gospels show him doing some miracles simply by saying a word or not even saying a word, but then other times he added other elements. So it probably means something, I’m just not sure what.

- Perhaps the smear of mud symbolized the man's spiritual and physical blindness and washing it off left him able to see the light both physically and spiritually.
- Perhaps since God created man out of dust and Jesus used dust to recreate working eyes, it symbolized his divine power.
- Perhaps it symbolized his religious authority, since people commonly believed that excretions such as blood and saliva were unclean and polluting except in the hands of religious authority, when they could be transformed into an instrument of blessing. Jesus' blood could spiritually cleanse and his spit could cure.
- In any case, it surely shocked people that he used his saliva. Even today, watching it in the video, it is a bit shocking when Jesus puts his muddy spit on the man's face! And it is interesting that Jesus sent the man off on his own, to find the Pool of Siloam and wash in it.

† In Greek, the pool is called Σιλωάμ, but Jesus would have called it by its Hebrew name, [שִׁלּוֹחַ]. Located at the bottom of the hill in the City of David, it is the same pool from which the High Priest got the water for the Temple water ceremony during the Festival of Tabernacles. The author, John, tells us that the pool's Hebrew name translates to "sent."

- God the Father sent the Son of God to be the Messiah/Christ, and Christ sent the blind man to the pool; now the blind man will see as a living illustration that Jesus is the light of the world. We will talk more about it in a few minutes, but this miracle is a sign: God the Father through his sent Messiah would give light to those in spiritual darkness.

John 9.8-12: Then the neighbors and the people who had seen him previously as a beggar began saying, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" Some people said, "This is the man!" while others said, "No, but he looks like him." The man himself kept insisting, "I am the one!" So they asked him, "How then were you made to see?" He replied, "The man called Jesus made mud, smeared it on my eyes and told me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed, and was able to see." They said to him, "Where is that man?" He replied, "I don't know."

† You should sense the excitement of everyone excitedly talking at once, as people see the results of the miracle: a man they knew as blind from birth suddenly could see! Can you imagine his excitement at seeing for the very first time, at experiencing sight which he never thought was possible! He still has not seen Jesus, but he heard the name, and he will never be the same!

[Slide 4: healed man] John 9.13-17: They brought the man who used to be blind to the Pharisees. (Now the day on which Jesus made the mud and caused him to see was a Sabbath.) So the Pharisees asked him [the man] again how he had gained his sight. He replied, "He put mud on my eyes and I washed, and now I am able to see." Then some of the Pharisees began to say, "This man [Jesus] is not from God [not a prophet], because he does not observe the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such miraculous signs?" Thus there was a division among them. So again they asked the man who used to be blind, "What do you say about him, since he caused you to see?" "He is a prophet," the man replied.

† The people were not trying to cause trouble by bringing the man to the Pharisees. The Pharisees were the teachers in local synagogues, like pastors of a church. I think the movie is wrong to show this scene in the temple, I think the people would have gone to their local synagogue. They had evidence of a miracle and wanted their local religious teachers to comment on it and share in it.

- † But the Pharisees were upset because Jesus did the miracle on the Sabbath. This issue had come up before. Jesus was not breaking the written Mosaic Law from God, but he had broken the man-made traditions of the Pharisees, which said healing on the Sabbath was sinful unless there was a risk of death. The Pharisees thought these traditions were just as binding and important as the Law itself.
- † The man still had not seen Jesus, but he believed Jesus must be a prophet from God, since he was able to heal him. This is a step of faith: before all he could admit was Jesus' name, but now he believes Jesus is a prophet. He is beginning to see spiritually as well as physically.

John 9.18-23: Now the Jewish religious leaders refused to believe that he had really been blind and had gained his sight until at last they summoned the parents of the man who had become able to see. They asked the parents, "Is this your son, whom you say was born blind? Then how does he now see?" So his parents replied, "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. But we do not know how he is now able to see, nor do we know who caused him to see. Ask him, he is a mature adult. He will speak for himself." (His parents said these things because they were afraid of the Jewish religious leaders. For the Jewish leaders had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Christ would be put out of the synagogue. For this reason his parents said, "He is a mature adult, ask him.")

- † Since they don't have unity among themselves, the Pharisees call the man's parents to verify the miracle. They were reluctant witnesses, fearing they would be thrown out of their local synagogue, but they did verify that the man was their son, that he was born blind and now could see.
- † After his series of provocative teachings during the Festival of Tabernacles, the religious leaders knew who Jesus was and what he was claiming about himself. They had put the word out, at least in Jerusalem, that anyone confessing Jesus to be the Messiah would be thrown out of the synagogue. For this reason, the parents were reluctant to say anything about Jesus or his miracle.

John 9.24-25: Then they [the Pharisees] summoned the man who used to be blind a second time and said to him, "Promise before God to tell the truth. We know that this man [Jesus] is a sinner." He replied, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. I do know one thing— that although I was blind, now I can see."

- † The Pharisees enjoined the man to tell the truth, using the idiom, "Give glory to God!" Somehow, in the heat of the argument, the Pharisees came to unity that Jesus was a sinner. But the man had a testimony: "One thing I do know, that being blind now I can see."
 - This is our testimony, right? We were blind, we were deceived, we were lost in the darkness, but now we see, now we have truth, now we are saved into the light that is life!

John 9.26-27: Then they said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he cause you to see?" He answered, "I told you already and you didn't listen. Why do you want to hear it again? You people don't want to become his disciples too, do you?"

- † The healed man can see now that they are not impartial toward Jesus. So he starts teasing them. He is choosing to identify with Jesus here, even though it will cost him in society and his synagogue. This is another step of faith, being willing to sacrifice and suffer for Jesus.

- † Can you see how the testimony and the willingness to suffer are related? It is because we once were blind in the darkness, but have been given sight and life in the light, that we are willing to suffer for Christ, we are willing to die for Christ, and whatever God has blessed us to have we are willing to sacrifice for Christ. It is because we have this testimony.
- † I have friends who are about to become missionaries to what is called a closed country. If they are caught doing evangelism, they could be deported or worse. They cannot build a church building, they cannot preach in public, they cannot distribute Bibles openly. Anyone considering Christ will know that they could face jail or beatings or death for converting. My friends have two children, a newborn and a three year old. They are willing to give up everything we enjoy here, our culture, our prosperity, our freedom; they are willing to risk everything, their safety, their health, even their children, for Christ. They have a witness: "One thing I do know, that being blind now I can see."

John 9.28-33: They heaped insults on him, saying, "You are his disciple! We are disciples of Moses! We know that God has spoken to Moses! We do not know where this man comes from!" The man replied, "This is a remarkable thing, that you don't know where he comes from, and yet he caused me to see! We know that God doesn't listen to sinners, but if anyone is devout and does his will, God listens to him. Never before has anyone heard of someone causing a man born blind to see. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

- † The Pharisees identified themselves as disciples of Moses, a hero of the faith. God spoke audibly to Moses and gave to Moses the Law that was the basis for the Jewish identity, faith, and way of life.
 - The Jews had made the Mosaic Law the key to their interpretation of scripture. For example, they assumed that Abraham had kept the Law, even though God gave it to Israel hundreds of years after Abraham's death. Paul would later argue against this hermeneutic, or interpretive system. He wrote that scripture must be interpreted chronologically, to see God's progressive revelation, especially about salvation.
 - After the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70, Judaism became almost entirely led by the Rabbis, who were almost entirely Pharisees. They held that the oral law developed and handed down over centuries was just as important as God's written law. Since Jesus had flouted these man-made rules, they were against him and could not see him as the Messiah.
 - The Jews and Gentiles who accepted Jesus as the Messiah returned to the written revelation of God in the Old Testament and accepted what God revealed to the apostles, consistent with that written word, in the New Testament. This would always be a divisive issue between the Rabbinic Jews and the Christian church.
 - When Jesus was in Jerusalem previously, in John 5, he told the religious leaders that if they truly understood what Moses had written, they would grasp that he wrote about Jesus as the Greatest Prophet, the Messiah-savior to come.
- † The Pharisees were angry that Jesus remained a thorn in their side, that Jesus continued to break their Sabbath traditions, that they could not disprove his miracle, and now that this healed man was mocking them. So they heaped insults on the healed man.
 - The insults and claims of the Pharisees did not quiet the healed man. He found their unbelief to be remarkable: in the face of Jesus healing him, the religious leaders were worried about what day it was, how Jesus healed him, and where Jesus was from.

- The healed man pointed out that nobody had ever given sight to a person born blind. This is verified by Jewish sources: healing from blindness was rarely documented, and never was it known that someone born blind was made to see.

John 9.34: They [the Pharisees] replied, “You were born completely in sinfulness, and yet you presume to teach us?” So they threw him out.

- † Probably the Pharisees threw him out of the room and excommunicated him from the synagogue. They were so angry that they were dismissive: rather than argue his theology or consider his ideas, they rebuked and insulted him. Their insult here could mean they thought his blindness was caused by sin – like the disciples thought in the beginning – or that he had been a sinner his whole life.

John 9.35: Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, so he found the man and said to him, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

- † The blind man had not seen Jesus until now. Jesus was not asking whether the man believed that Jesus as the Son of Man existed, but rather whether he would put his faith in Jesus. As the man had been given physical sight, he had accepted the spiritual light, but he did not yet know much about it. Jesus found him again and would now bring him to decisive faith.

[Slide 5: worship] John 9.36-38: The man replied, “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” Jesus told him, “You have seen him; he is the one speaking with you.” He said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.

- † In the gospel of John, this is the only time someone is said to “worship” Jesus. Probably John wants to convey the full meaning of the Greek verb προσκυνέω, which means to bow down, to prostrate yourself in an attitude of submission and dependence. This man has put his faith in Jesus. He might not yet understand the fullness of Jesus’ identity as Son of God, but he believes Jesus is Messiah-savior who can reveal and redeem in God’s name. His faith is growing...

John 9.39-41: Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world, so that those who do not see may gain their sight, and the ones who see may become blind.” Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this and asked him, “We are not blind too, are we?” Jesus replied, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin, but now because you claim that you can see, your guilt remains.”

- † Earlier in this gospel, we learned Jesus did not come for judgment, now it appears he says he did. Jesus will return for judgment, to grant new physical life on the new earth to those with faith and to condemn those without. But this first time, he came to reveal the basis for that decision, to shine his light and separate those who would respond in faith from those who would not.
 - We saw early in this gospel that John explained, John 3.19 NET: “Now this is the basis for judging: that the light has come into the world and people loved the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil.”
- † What happens when the light shines? Some are made to see, like the man born blind, while others, who think they see, turn away blinded as it were by the light.
 - Those who know they are blind acknowledge their need and seek the Savior, and so end up free of guilt from sin. The Pharisees were satisfied with their religious insights based on their

traditions, they didn't see that they needed Jesus, so they rejected the light of the Messiah, and therefore their guilt before God remained.

Meaning of the Sign

- † **[Slide 6: Isaiah]** It's a nice story, but what does it mean? In v.39, Jesus tells us that this is an acted out parable, a real life illustration of the claims Jesus recently made in John 8, that he was the Son of God and the light of the world. It also is a show of power that the light will conquer the darkness.
- † When Judah was still in the promised land, the prophet Isaiah predicted their exile into Babylon due to the failure of the Davidic Kings, that is the kings who were descendants of David. Then Isaiah predicted the return of the Jews from exile and freedom from foreign rule through the ultimate Davidic King, known as "the Servant of Yahweh," who would substitute for their sins.
 - Through Isaiah, God declared that the Jews were blind to God's truth, but that the ultimate Davidic King would deliver them from this blindness and restore them in relationship with God, while reversing the curse on the earth, and thus even the physically blind would see.
 - Fast forward 700 years from Isaiah's day, Jesus healed a man born blind – a miracle never known before – identifying himself as the ultimate Davidic King who would deliver the nation from its blindness to God's truth and restore them to right relationship with God, while reversing the curse.
- † We are called to believe what the sign tells us: that Jesus is the divine Son of God, the Jewish Messiah-savior we call Christ who as the servant of God the Father became our substitute on the cross when he paid for our sins, and the ultimate king in the line of David who one day will reconcile the Jews with their God and reverse the curse on the Earth.
 - Isaiah quoted God the Father talking to the Servant Messiah [42.6-12 NET]: "I, the LORD [Yahweh], officially commission you; I take hold of your hand. I protect you and make you a covenant mediator for people, and a light to the nations, to open blind eyes, to release prisoners from dungeons, those who live in darkness from prisons. I am the LORD [Yahweh]! That is my name! I will not share my glory with anyone else, or the praise due me with idols. Look, my earlier predictive oracles have come to pass; now I announce new events. Before they begin to occur, I reveal them to you."
 - [Then Isaiah continues...] "Sing to the LORD [Yahweh] a brand new song! Praise him from the horizon of the earth, you who go down to the sea, and everything that lives in it, you coastlands and those who live there! Let the desert and its cities shout out, the towns where the nomads of Kedar live! Let the residents of Sela shout joyfully; let them shout loudly from the mountaintops. Let them give the LORD [Yahweh] the honor he deserves; let them praise his deeds in the coastlands."
 - What about us? We were all born spiritually blind at birth, deceived into walking in the darkness because of our corrupted human nature. Will we remain blind to who Jesus is and what he offers us in salvation? Or will we emerge from the darkness, running to his light, putting our trust, our faith, in him, and then praising Yahweh, God, for our deliverance?
 - Let's pray...