

# **Sermon: Jesus Heals the Man Born Blind**

**Text: John 9:1-41 ESV**

**Gary L. Wackler**

**December 6, 2020**

**Introduction:** Close your eyes and try to develop a mental image of God. I hope it is an accurate one. The blind man in our story must have had a mental image of God (although not visual). It was that of a cruel, and unforgiving God who had forgotten him, he thought. His own people told him he deserved his God-forsaken condition. And he had heard this from the time he could understand.

If you are blind, jokes about your condition are not always viewed as humorous. Blind people have been the source of jokes for a long time. Even Helen Keller becomes a topic for jokes. You've heard them:

**Q: What is Helen Keller's favorite color?**

**A: Corduroy**

**A blind man walks into a store with his seeing eye dog. All of a sudden, he picks up the leash and begins swinging the dog over his head. The manager runs up to the man and asks, "What are you doing?!" The blind man replies, "Just looking around."**

**A blind man was describing his favorite sport, parachuting. When asked how this was accomplished, he said that things were all done for him: "I am placed in the door of the plane with my seeing eye dog and told when to jump. My hand is placed on my release ring for me and out I go with the dog." But how do you know when you are going to land?" he was asked. "I have a very keen sense of smell, and I can smell the trees and grass when I am 300 feet from the ground," he answered. "But how do you know when to lift your legs for the final arrival on the ground?" he was again asked. He quickly answered: "Oh, the dog's leash goes slack."**

**Q. Then why don't you see a lot of blind skydivers?**

**A. It scares the dog.**

**Most of the time when you tell a joke there are usually people around you who cannot laugh. Jokes about mental illness (whose family may have just experienced a suicide), religion (priest, rabbi, and minister, if you are in Northern Ireland), politics (I quit watching late night comics like Jimmy Fallon because of his constant rants against our president), jokes about drinking and drugs or Cheech and Chong movies of the past. If your life or a loved one's life has been ruined by drugs, is that really funny?**

**Q. What would be a good title for this section in John?**

**A. *Illegal Sabbath Spit* (Michael Card, *The Parable of Joy*, p. 131)**

There a similar setting for another miracle in John's gospel. You might remember in **John 5**, there was a man at the pool. Both here and in John 5 faith comes *after* the healing; there is the concept of sin=disease, and both men suffer as a consequence because of their new-found faith in Jesus.

Let's walk through this drama that unfolds in **John 9** knowing all the time John is trying to write something that will help us understand God. In fact he clearly states why he writes anything toward the end of his gospel.

**John 20:30-31 ESV** <sup>30</sup> Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; <sup>31</sup> but these are written 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.

**Chapter 9** of John's Gospel is where "Jesus Heals the Man Born Blind." For our purposes, let's look at this narrative as a play with different scenes.

**Scene 1 - John 9:1-7 ESV** <sup>1</sup> As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup> And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" <sup>3</sup> Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. <sup>4</sup> We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. <sup>5</sup> As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." <sup>6</sup> 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 <sup>7</sup> 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 here are just passing by. There is really no intent to help the blind man. The disciples prefer to turn the blind man's condition into a theological discussion. Can you imagine someone pointing you out and saying: "well, you know the reason you have cancer is you're not a Christian, or you do not have enough faith."

<sup>2</sup> And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" <sup>3</sup> Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.

The Kingdom of God isn't a theological discussion or Bible study. It is love and grace in action. Jesus states who He is in [verse 5](#). He is the Light of the world, and then he demonstrates this truth! Jesus bends down and makes up a mud pie and applies it to the man's eyes -- not very high-tech. Jesus tells the blind man what to do. The blind man obeys and is healed. And then he goes home... no real faith required here on the part of the man.

You might even notice the humbleness of the request Jesus makes of the man. Sometimes what we are asked to do may not be what we expected – but it may be something that the Lord needs from us so that we can be healed.

**Scene 2** ([vv. 8-12](#)) - finds the blind man home among friends and family. They question him. How could this be? Who did this for you? The blind man told them what he could. [John 9:8-12 ESV](#) <sup>8</sup> 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?” <sup>9</sup> Some said, “It is he.” Others said, “No, but he is like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” <sup>10</sup> So they said to him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” <sup>11</sup> 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.” <sup>12</sup> They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

Q. - Why all the questions?

A. - This healing did not fit in with their understanding of how God acts.

And quite frankly, for some people no amount of evidence or testimony will convince them about God's acting in His world. “I'm a good person,” they say. “I read the Bible.” “I don't need to go to church.” All the while they do not know Jesus, the Head of the Church and the author of every verse in the Bible. Many are just like the Pharisees who claimed to know God yet remained blind to His very presence.

**In the third scene** ([vv. 13-17](#)) and because this is obviously a religious problem: <sup>13</sup> They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. <sup>14</sup> Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. <sup>15</sup> 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.” <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?” He said, “He is a prophet.”

You'll notice the progression in faith here by the man whom Jesus healed. He referred to Jesus as just a man in [verse 11](#), and now in [verse 17](#), Jesus is a prophet. Because the Pharisees were not getting the expected answers from the man healed by Jesus they sought others who might respond the way they hoped and wanted.

**Scene 4** ([vv. 18-23](#)) - 18 The Jews (*religious leaders*) 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 19 and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" 20 His parents answered, "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. 21 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 may not have known the answers the Pharisees wanted, but they did know what *not* to say. They didn't want to be put out of the synagogue and lose their place and respect in the community. So rather than stand up for the truth, they avoided any response and passed it back to their son. 22 (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.) 23 Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

So not only is Jesus on trial but anyone who would side up with Him. Many times it is easier to continue to try and find evidence or an opinion that agrees with your own point of view than to rethink a preconceived idea.

**In Scene 5** ([vv. 24-34](#)) 24 So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, "Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner." 25 He answered, "Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." 26 They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" 27 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?"

Here is yet another attempt to discredit Jesus so as to make it difficult for Him to gain disciples. Try as they might, the man whom Jesus healed of blindness does not back down. The man even implies he is a disciple of Jesus now([verse 27](#)).

Those questioning the man have a difficult situation. They can believe the argument (i.e. who else could do this?), the evidence and the witnesses, or stay with their interpretation of how God works in the world.

28 And they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. 29 We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” It was practically easier for the Pharisees to choose their understanding of things and expel the man from the synagogue (vv. 30-33). 30 The man answered, “Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. 31 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. 32 Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” 34 They answered him, “You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?” And they cast him out.

Toward the end of **Scene 5** the man whom Jesus healed refers to Jesus as a *godly man*. The progression is complete where in the final scene he will call Jesus, LORD!

In the last scene [**Scene 6** (vv. 35-41)] 35 Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” (*Son of God in some mss.*) 36 He answered, “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” 37 Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.” 38 He said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him. 39 Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.” 40 Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, “Are we also blind?” 41 Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; (*sin*) but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.

Jesus finds the man whom He had healed and reveals Himself to the man in a way that FAITH results. Jesus is recognized as Lord. And as a result, there is worship. Jesus had to tell the man who he was though – because his exemplary life was not sufficient by itself to reveal to the blind man his need. How then can we expect people to get the idea that they need the Lord just by seeing *our* lives? Our lives should not betray the gospel, but just living the Christian life is not enough either. We need to verbalize our faith because the world is blind.

We need to witness with the spoken word about the Living Word everyday! Did you notice who was on stage in every scene of this drama? It was the man whom Jesus healed of blindness. It is the now-healed man who tries to explain, who faces accusers, who suffers without the support of family or friends, who confesses, who is expelled from the synagogue and finally becomes Jesus’ disciple.

Jesus appears and opens the man's eyes; Jesus goes away; Jesus came a second time to receive, confirm, and vindicate this new disciple. Can anyone miss, then, what John is doing? The life of the disciple, the life of the church which lies between the coming of Jesus and the next and final coming of Jesus, is certainly being portrayed. The members of John's community must have wept and prayed and laughed and hoped as they read this narrative, because the drama is their own. Blessed by Jesus, to be sure, and able now to see the grace and truth of God through the word of Jesus, but since then what has life been for them? Explaining and arguing with old neighbors, suffering alienation from family members who do not believe, and being branded as heretics and expelled themselves from the synagogue. But there is the firm hope of Jesus' final appearance in full revelation to confirm and to vindicate his disciples."

Finally Jesus gives hope to the spiritually blind of this world, but also levies a pronouncement of judgment as the Son of Man against those who are so arrogant, who claim to see, yet cannot. Their guilt remains, Jesus says.

To become self-assured, to close the mind to any further word from God, to be the possessors of the final truth with no need to listen to prophets, to build institutions without the means and occasions of self-criticism would be to write into the script "disciples" instead of "Pharisees" and "church" instead of "synagogue."

*(adapted from material found in Fred Craddock's commentary on John, p.73)*

**Conclusion:** Here's a perspective from a survivor of Auschwitz: It never occurred to me to question God's doings or lack of doings while I was an inmate of Auschwitz, although of course I understand others did... I was no less or no more religious because of what the Nazis did to us; and I believe my faith in God was not undermined in the least. It never occurred to me to associate the calamity we were experiencing with God, to blame Him, or to believe in Him less or cease believing in Him at all because He didn't come to our aid. God doesn't owe us that, or anything. We owe our lives to Him. If someone believes God is responsible for the death of six million because He didn't somehow do something to save them, he's got his thinking reversed. We owe God our lives for the few or many years we live, and we have the duty to worship Him and do as He commands us. That's what we're here on earth for, to be in God's service, to do God's bidding.

*Harold S. Kushner, When Bad Things Happen To Good People, pp. 85-86.*

There is a small fish found in the quiet freshwater lagoons of Central and South America called “Cuatro Ojos” (4 eyes) or its more formal name *anableps*. Its name literally means “those that look upward.” It is a Greek word.

An *anableps* has the ability to see both above and below the water at the same time. They see in both worlds. There is a very interesting miracle story recorded by Mark about Jesus healing the blind man, Bartimaeus. Listen to that story:

**Mark 10:46-51 ESV** <sup>46</sup> And they came to Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside. <sup>47</sup> And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” <sup>48</sup> And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” <sup>49</sup> And Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart. Get up; he is calling you.” <sup>50</sup> And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. <sup>51</sup> And Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” And the blind man said to him, “Rabbi, let me recover my sight.”

The phrase translated “recover my sight” here in the ESV, reads “I want to see” in the NIV. The Greek word in the text here is *αναβλεπω* and can also literally mean to look up to heaven. Here in Mark’s gospel, Bartimaeus may have been saying: I want to see in both worlds (the physical AND the spiritual).

And John in his writings is famous for double meanings and talking about the physical and spiritual at the same time.

This last verse in Mark’s story reads: <sup>52</sup> And Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way. The word “well” here is from *σωζω* and can also mean to save or rescue.

I can remember when I was in fifth grade I got glasses. Children with glasses sometimes get teased. Maybe you were made fun of. “Four-eyes,” they would say! Corrected vision, they call it. I hope that I can always see in the physical world, but seeing Jesus in the spiritual realm is so very much more important.

**Song - *Open Our Eyes***