

“Spiritual Sight”

John 9-10:21

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When I was 10 years old, I got eye glasses. I can still vividly remember the experience. As soon as I put the glasses on everything became sharp and clear. My first view outside was spectacular. Trees were no longer green blobs. Trees were beautiful with branches, different shaped leaves, and textured bark. I could tell the difference between a rock and a squirrel. There were birds everywhere. The colors were so defined no longer blurring into each other. On the horizon I could see lakes, hills, and forests. I spent the ride home pressed to the window enjoying the sights. The rest of the day I explored the farm enjoying what appeared to me as a whole new world.

What if each of us could put on some "God glasses" that allow us to see the beauty of each person? What if we could see all the dimensions God sees? What would we see in the spiritual dimension? The gospel of John has a theme moving from darkness to light, from literal to spiritual levels of sight.

Our scripture today is a very long account of Jesus giving sight to a blind man. It is full of details and layers of meaning. It is a story of spiritual blindness and sight. It is so confusing everyone had a different view of its meaning. Jesus explains the meaning and illustrates it with a parable.

Together we will explore this scripture stopping to reflect on what might be God's word to you today. I invite you to imagine yourself in the story. Invite God to give you insight through your imagination. What is God saying to you as a blind person, a disciple, a pharisee, a parent, a witness.

Let us pray. Ever-present God, clear our minds, flood our imagination with your truth, please heal our blindness, and give us vivid sight. Holy Spirit as you transform our mind connect your blessings to our heart so we are transformed with love and joy. Amen

John 9:1(NLT) “As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth.

Jesus truly sees each person. Jesus saw this man his gifts, dreams, fears, triumphs, failures, love, joy, all of it. Jesus is gracious. Jesus forgives all sins. Jesus sees the future when each person is transformed into a glorious person. Jesus saw a cherished, beloved member of God's family. Jesus is the only one throughout the entire situation that sees this person, not even his parents were capable of truly seeing this man. His name is never revealed, because only Jesus saw him. Everyone else defines the man by his blindness.

John 9:1-2(NLT) “As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. “Rabbi,” his disciples asked him, “Why was this man born blind?”

The disciples saw a theological problem to be solved. Jesus saw a person. The disciples saw a discussion about God and why suffering exists. Martin Buber puts it this way. Jesus saw a "Thou" and the disciples saw an "it". Jesus recognized an opportunity for God's work to be revealed. The disciples saw a way to lay blame. Jesus found an opportunity to alleviate suffering. The disciples found a chance to talk about suffering, to try and understand the why behind suffering. Jesus viewed the man in the present and foresaw his glorious future in heaven for eternity. The disciples saw him in terms of his past. Jesus saw resurrection. The disciples saw guilt.

How does the church see people? As a giver to sustain the church or a unique expression of the image of God? As a problem to be discussed and solved or a beloved sibling? As a broken person or an opportunity for grace to be made perfect in weakness? As a sinner or a person who will celebrate eternal life with us?

The disciples' question comes from a long held, but mistaken, assumption that misfortune and illness are caused by sin, that natural disasters are sent based on the morality of people. Jesus said neither this man's sin, lifestyle, or morality nor his parents are the reasons for his circumstances and suffering. Conversely a person does not enjoy health and success by his lack of sin and moral living.

What would Jesus say about the American work ethic? Pull yourself up by the bootstraps. I have worked hard to get where I am and so if you can't do the same, regardless of what other circumstances and systems are at play then there must be something wrong with you. It seems that Jesus is saying that this line of thinking is wrong. Some do not deserve health care. People get what they deserve. This way of thinking blinds, it gives one an escape from encountering another's suffering, from really noticing the person. We get blinded by the supposed problem rather than seeing the person. We diagnose a problem then jump to fix it instead of listening, caring, and being with the person. The disciples' question may have been a defense mechanism to protect against the pain. Finding someone to blame, including God, distances us from God and each other. When one experiences suffering, a natural inclination is to try and make sense of the unacceptable reality. On earth we will never discover the why to suffering. We can, however, stop and truly see the one who is suffering and be with them. No one deserves to be excluded.

Jesus does not put up defenses and barriers. Jesus does not launch into a sermon. Jesus sees us. Jesus bears our burden with us. Jesus carries us. Jesus even comforts, guides and gets us through the valley of the shadow of death to the glorious house of The Lord.

How do you see people? How are you like the disciples not seeing a person instead judging them by what they have or don't have, judging them by their skills, abilities, and successes? How are you like the blind man longing to be seen as a person and not as a disability, poor, and a nuisance? How are you like the blind man in your thoughts? Do you see yourself as Jesus sees you, a beloved precious child of God, or do you get your worth from your grades, job, relationships or accomplishments?

John 9:2-3 (NLT) "Rabbi," his disciples asked Jesus, "Why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or his parents' sins?" "It was not because of his sins or his parents' sins," Jesus answered. "This happened so the power of God could be seen in him.

Why was I born blind so the power of God can be seen in me? Why do you suffer so the power of God can be seen in you? God created you, everyone and the entire cosmos good. Every form of suffering, brokenness, incompleteness is a by-product of sin, a fallen world. Suffering is often random. Your lifestyle may or may not affect your circumstances. God is at work in every person. If you look close enough you can see how God is healing every person, including yourself. How is God healing you today? What is God doing through you to reveal the power of God?

The Message translates the verse as: **John 9:3 (MSG) "Jesus said, "You are asking the wrong question. You are looking for someone to blame. There is no such cause-effect here. Look instead for what God can do."**

Jesus continues speaking. **John 9: 4-7 (NLT) "We must quickly carry out the tasks assigned us by God who sent us. The night is coming, and then no one can work. But while I am here in the world, I am the light of the world."** Then Jesus spit on the ground, made

mud with the saliva, and spread the mud over the blind man's eyes. Jesus told him, "Go wash yourself in the pool of Siloam" (Siloam means "sent"). So the man went and washed and came back seeing!"

Jesus can heal anyone and everyone instantly. Why use spat and dirt to make a mud compress? Why have him go and wash in a pool? Why all these extra steps? Why does God not heal everyone instantly? Are these questions worth pursuing or are they distractions that divert our attention away from seeing people and seeing the power of God healing people?

John 9:8-12 (NLT) "The blind man's neighbors and others who knew him as a blind beggar asked each other, "Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?" Some said he was, and others said, "No, he just looks like him!" But the beggar kept saying, "Yes, I am the same one!" They asked, "Who healed you? What happened?" He told them, "The man they call Jesus made mud and spread it over my eyes and told me, 'Go to the pool of Siloam and wash yourself.' So I went and washed, and now I can see!" "Where is he now?" they asked. "I don't know," he replied."

These verses are tragically sad. Imagine yourself as the blind man. Your neighbors and friends never really saw you; they only saw your blindness, so when you are no longer blind they don't even recognize you. The tragically blind here are the ones with physical sight. The spiritually blind are those who see all poor people, or disabled people, or those different from themselves as the same, who see them by what they have, can do or their outer appearance instead of seeing each person as a beautiful individual. Not one single person celebrates the healing. No one runs up and gives him a hug. No one praises God for the healing. Instead they interrogate the man, who they saw as a blind beggar all their life, but never really saw as a person. How are you spiritually blind like the neighbors? When someone changes often they are not recognized by others. When have you wanted to change back someone who has changed?

John 9:13-34 (NLT) "Then they took the man who had been blind to the Pharisees, because it was on the Sabbath that Jesus had made the mud and healed him. The Pharisees asked the man all about it. So he told them, "Jesus put the mud over my eyes, and when I washed it away, I could see!" Some of the Pharisees said, "This man Jesus is not from God, for he is working on the Sabbath." Others said, "But how could an ordinary sinner do such miraculous signs?" So there was a deep division of opinion among them. Then the Pharisees again questioned the man who had been blind and demanded, "What's your opinion about this man who healed you?" The man replied, "I think he must be a prophet." The Jewish leaders still refused to believe the man had been blind and could now see, so they called in his parents. They asked them, "Is this your son? Was he born blind? If so, how can he now see?" His parents replied, "We know this is our son and that he was born blind, but we don't know how he can see or who healed him. Ask him. He is old enough to speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who had announced that anyone saying Jesus was the Messiah would be expelled from the synagogue. That's why they said, "He is old enough. Ask him." So for the second time they called in the man who had been blind and told him, "God should get the glory for this, because we know this man Jesus is a sinner." "I don't know whether he is a sinner," the man replied. "But I know this: I was blind, and now I can see!" "But what did he do?" they asked. "How did he heal you?" "Look!" the man exclaimed. "I told you once. Didn't you listen? Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?" Then they cursed him and said, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses! We know God spoke to Moses, but we don't even know where this man comes from." "Why, that's

very strange!” the man replied. **“He healed my eyes, and yet you don’t know where he comes from? We know that God doesn’t listen to sinners, but God is ready to hear those who worship God and do God’s will. Ever since the world began, no one has been able to open the eyes of someone born blind. If this man were not from God, he couldn’t have done it.”** **“You were born a total sinner!”** they answered. **“Are you trying to teach us?”** And they **threw him out of the synagogue.**

The Pharisees take no delight in the miracle only offense. Why is that? The Pharisee within us believes the activity of God must be according to our understanding and fit within our belief system, our creeds, and our interpretations of scripture or else it is invalid. In others words, God is not larger than one’s concept of God. God does not work outside our preconceived ideas. It is putting God in a box. This thinking goes; God cannot work through my interpretation of a Sabbath breaker, so this must not be God. God cannot save someone how does not live a certain way or do a certain act of faith or at least show up at a church sometime in their life. This thinking goes, I know how God wants people to live and I am going to impose my understanding on others who perceive God’s will differently. Our knowledge of God, our worship, our beliefs, sometimes blinds us to God’s activity. Our spiritual blindness, limiting God’s blessing to a certain group of people, is much worse than physical blindness. How do you put God in a box? Have you ever thought that someone is beyond the saving grace of God?

The blind man never asked to be healed. There is no act of faith. This man never attended temple. At the time of his healing he does not even know who Jesus is, not alone believe in Jesus.

John 9:35-41 (NLT) “When Jesus heard what had happened, he found the man and asked, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” The man answered, “Who is he, sir? I want to believe in him.” “You have seen him,” Jesus said, “and he is speaking to you!” “Yes, Lord, I believe!” the man said. And he worshiped Jesus. Then Jesus told him, “I entered this world to render judgment—to give sight to the blind and to show those who think they see that they are blind.” Some Pharisees who were standing nearby heard him and asked, “Are you saying we’re blind?” “If you were blind, you wouldn’t be guilty,” Jesus replied. “But you remain guilty because you claim you can see.”

Barbara Brown Taylor calls this scripture “A Tale of Two Heretics.” The people see only two sinners the blind man and Jesus; the man because he was born blind, Jesus because he healed on the Sabbath. In reality all the people are sinners because they failed to truly see and love the blind man. They failed to rejoice in God’s healing. Today we are the blind. We are the Pharisees. We are the religious people, who follow tradition, who believe we can tell who is speaking and trying to live God’s will. We are the guardians of the faith, the baptized worshipers, law-abiding, pledge-paying, creed-saying, theologically correct people who believe we can see the activity of God. Jesus challenges us, every time we think we can see better than another, every time we believe we are better than any other person those are times when we are blind. According to John the people who are the most blind are those who are telling another you cannot see God in that way, at that place, by living like that. Despite their good intentions to love God and love another, their blindness emerges when they tell another that they need to live a certain way. Meanwhile the man born blind who was not sure about anything, saw the light. All of us are spiritually blind. One day Jesus will give all of us sight.

The purpose of the law is not to exclude rather to draw us into healthy relationship with God and each other. The law is not meant to divide; rather God gave the law as a gift to show us how to live together in harmony.

Jesus now illustrates his healing and teachings with a parable. **John 10:1-21 (NLT)** “I tell you the truth, anyone who sneaks over the wall of a sheepfold, rather than going through the gate, must surely be a thief and a robber! But the one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep recognize his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice. They won’t follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don’t know his voice.” Those who heard Jesus use this illustration didn’t understand what he meant, so Jesus explained it to them: “I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me were thieves and robbers. But the true sheep did not listen to them. Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life. “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don’t belong to him and he isn’t their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. The hired hand runs away because he’s working only for the money and doesn’t really care about the sheep. “I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep. I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd. “The Father loves me because I sacrifice my life so I may take it back again. No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded.” When Jesus said these things, the people were again divided in their opinions about him. Some said, “He’s demon possessed and out of his mind. Why listen to a man like that?” Others said, “This doesn’t sound like a man possessed by a demon! Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”

We are all blind. Praise God that Jesus is healing our sight. Amen