

# **I Met Jesus: the Blind Man and the Blind Men**

## **John 9**

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There is a movie that has been out long enough that I think I can tell you the spoiler without making anyone mad at me. *The Sixth Sense* was a popular movie in 1999 and it told the story of a boy who was able to see dead people walking around. He could interact with them; talk with them. The thing about these dead people was that they didn't realize they were dead. They were confused. This was the boy's sixth sense. Bruce Willis portrayed the boy's psychologist who helps him deal with this phenomenon. The plot twist is at the end when the Bruce Willis character discovers that he's not the boy's psychologist, but rather, he is actually one of the dead people too. He thought he was alive, but in fact he was dead.

This kind of "status confusion" is at the heart of John 9. The metaphor is different, but the point is the same. Some people are blind and some can see. This is the next message in our series, *I Met Jesus: People Who Encountered Jesus in the Gospel of John*. What happened? What was the outcome for them?

John 9 is long – too long for a full exposition. We are introduced to our character in verse 1. "*As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth.*" (John 9:1)

### **What do we Know About the Blind Man?**

#### **He was born blind (Verse 1)**

Right away we must feel compassion for him. Have you ever considered which of your five senses you would most hate to lose? I think I would choose sight. So much of life involves seeing. There are so many beautiful things to see. Much of functional life depends on the ability to see. This man had never seen anything. He was "blind from birth." All his life people tried to explain "seeing." If you've never seen, how can you comprehend the sun, or color, or motion, or what a human face "looks" like? He had never seen anything. He has lived a very difficult life.

#### **Beggar (Verse 8)**

His blindness in that culture gave him only one real career option – begging. With today's technology, a blind person has some options and we can be glad for that. There was none of that in the first century. Further, there were no facilities dedicated to their care. There were no schools for the blind. No workplaces for them. They had to beg. I have been in places of the world where this is common; China and India come to my mind. To walk the streets there is to be confronted by the blind and the crippled with their hands out asking for money. That was this man. He was a blind beggar. To sit and beg was to acknowledge to society that you are without resource, without vocation, and without societal standing. Imagine what every day was like for him. He was a real person with all the desires and dreams that you and I have.

## Well known to others (Verse 8)

He was well known. He was the blind beggar. The locals were accustomed to seeing him and no doubt had supported him with their alms and gifts.

*"And his disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.'"* (John 9:2-5)

This is not the disciples at their compassionate best. They see the blind man and rather than feeling sympathy or seeking to meet his need, they want to assess blame for why he's blind in first place. The common understanding of the day was that blindness and other physical suffering were the result of a person's sin or their parents' sin. *"...but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."* (Exodus 34:7)

You may remember Job's friends doing the same thing with Job's sufferings; wanting to say that suffering is the smoke, sin is the fire. *You've obviously really ticked God off, Job.* Thankfully, Jesus demolishes this argument. This is not the main point and time is fleeting, but since we all face suffering and see others who suffer, it's important to hear what Jesus says. Sin was not the cause; rather, it was so that *"the works of God might be displayed in him."* In other words, personal sin was not the explanation for why he was blind. His blindness was purposed by God to be the context for God to display His power and glory.

A quick theology of sin and suffering says all suffering in a cosmic sense is the result of sin. In Genesis 3, sin is what broke this perfect creation. Sin brought death and disease. Sin is the root cause of all pain, physical, relational, and spiritual. However, while that is true in a general sense, it is not necessarily true in an individual sense. It *can* be as Scripture does allow for suffering to be the natural consequence of our own sinful decisions. If I rob a bank, I may suffer many unintended consequences for my sin. God can and will discipline us for our sin. But here is the key: *we don't know why things happen!* When people self-appoint themselves to be judge and jury for other peoples' suffering, we are taking a position only God knows – especially for a man *born* blind. What could he have done before he was born? Nothing. Jesus says his blindness is a God-ordained context to display His glory.

Now there's a redemptive word for the suffering we endure. All suffering is the result of sin, but all individual suffering can be redemptive as God uses all suffering, even blindness, to glorify who He is. Are you suffering today? Are you asking yourself, "What did I do to deserve this?" You are looking at it like the disciples and not like Jesus. The real question is, *How can I glorify God in this? How can I turn my suffering or my handicap into something God can use?* I'm not saying that's easy to do, but it will bring meaning and purpose to suffering that the "what did I do to deserve this?" will never produce.

The key verse here is verse 5. *As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.* Are you discerning a pattern here? When He met the woman at the well, standing next to a well of water, what did He say He was? Living water. When 15,000 people showed up to be near Him in a remote place, what did He say He was? The bread of life. Now He is standing next to a man who has been in the darkness of blindness his whole life, and what does He say He is? *I am the light of the world.* In each case, Jesus is using the physical need to explain the spiritual one. Did the woman really need physical water or spiritual water? Did the hungry

masses need physical bread or spiritual bread? What did the blind man need, really? He needed spiritual light.

But here sits this blind beggar. Perhaps he didn't get into the theological debate on suffering, but there's one thing we can know. The greatest fantasy dream of his life was to be able to see. Look what Jesus did.

*"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 and said to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing." (John 9:6-7)*

Lest some of you come up to me afterwards and say, "You didn't tell us why Jesus had to spit and make mud and send him to the pool to be healed." There is a reason. I don't know what it is. The best answer I read is that those of us who have never healed a man of blindness probably shouldn't be evaluating whether Jesus did it right or not. We know he didn't have to make mud to do it. He healed many people with just a word. I would suspect His going to the pool of Siloam was kind of like Naaman in the Old Testament having to bathe in the Jordan River to be healed. It demonstrated faith – particularly for a blind man to go and do anything. How he got there, we don't know. But he did. He obeyed and he was healed.

This story is long so let's hit the highlights.

*"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.' 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 9:8-12)*

Can you imagine this? I can relate in a very small way. I remember in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, I got glasses and braces within two week's time. I went from totally sheik to totally geek and have stayed solidly in the geek squad since. I remember putting on my glasses for the first time and suddenly everything was in focus. I was amazed. I distinctly remember the ride home and seeing the trees in the fields and actually seeing branches and leaves. Over time my sight had gotten worse and I didn't realize it. Then I put glasses on and could really see again. The whole world looked beautiful!

Imagine if you've never seen anything at all. Suddenly, you can see. Every plant has to be looked at. Every human body is fascinating. Every color is...wow! I see this guy walking home from the Pool of Siloam dancing and laughing and really looking at things. He gets back home and the people see him. He looks like the same guy. He's dressed like the same guy. But this guy is walking without assistance. This guy can see. "Tom, is that you?"

"Yes!"

"Can't be. You can see!"

"Yes, it's me. Isn't it wonderful?"

"You are freaking me out. Are you his twin?"

"It's me!"

"How did this happen?"

"A guy put mud on my face and told me to wash in the pool of Siloam and as the mud came off my eyes, I could see! By the way, I imagined you much thinner than you are....Yes, it's me!" This created no small stir. How did this happen?

Let me summarize verses 13-34. The people are awestruck and go to the Pharisees to see what they think. The Pharisees were the religious leaders and the local experts on all things supernatural. As we've learned, they were also full of themselves and extremely self-righteous. And they hated Jesus. We discover that Jesus healed the man on the Sabbath. This was not a violation of biblical command, but the Pharisees had their own set of religious rules, and supernatural healings were definitely not allowed on Saturdays. Doesn't that sound funny? No miracles on Saturdays!

Verse 13 begins a debate as to the propriety of Jesus healing this man on the Sabbath and what that says about Him. Some said, "He obviously is from God."

Others said, "He can't be because God likes our rules and Jesus didn't follow them." They ask the former blind man, "Who do you think he is?"

Verse 17, "*He is a prophet.*" They call in the man's parents in verse 18 hoping to discredit the miracle by finding out the man was not born blind. The parents are completely intimidated and tell them to ask the man; he can speak for himself. So in verse 24 they call the man back in.

"How did Jesus do this?" His honest common sense response infuriates them.

He answers in verse 27, "*I have told you already!...Do you want to become his disciples?*" This infuriates them. The man goes on to say, "How can He be a sinner, He healed a man born blind. Who has ever heard of such a thing? He must be from God." The Pharisees couldn't bear his logic anymore and permanently excommunicated him from Temple worship. The chapter concludes with Jesus finding the man. Let's read it.

*"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. Jesus said, 'For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.' Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, 'Are we also blind?' Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains.'" (John 9:35-41)*

### **What the Healing of the Blind Man is Really About**

There are 41 verses in this chapter, how many of them are about the healing itself? Two. The point of the chapter is not that Jesus heals (although that is wonderful); it is about light and darkness, blindness and seeing. It is wonderfully written to juxtapose what unbelief (blindness) looks like and what belief (seeing) looks like.

#### **Pharisees**

*Jesus is not from God  
He doesn't keep our rules  
Jesus is a sinner  
We are disciples of Moses!  
You were born in sin (not us)  
We are the experts!*

#### **Blind Man**

*Jesus is a prophet  
He comes from God  
He is the Son of Man  
Lord  
I believe!*

Could the differences be any starker? Light/darkness. Blindness/sight. The twist here is like *The Sixth Sense*. The ones everyone thought could see (including themselves) turn out to be the ones who are actually blind. The one who was actually blind turns out to be the only one who can see.

***The purpose of the healing of the blind man was to illustrate that Jesus is the Light of the World. His light blinds some and causes others to see.***

That is the key here. What is the difference between those who are spiritually blind and those who can spiritually see? Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:4-6,

*"In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Corinthians 4:4-6)*

Remember the progression of the blind man. Healer. Prophet. Son of Man. Lord. Believe. The light of understanding and faith unveiled Jesus' true identity. But for the Pharisees, the light blinded them and their willful and almost humorous unwillingness to believe shows just how blind they are. That is the meaning of verse 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."*

"He is the real light which shows up the hidden motives and the darkest secrets of men. The inevitable consequence of His presence in the world is a separation between those who claim to have religious insight though they are in fact spiritually blind, and those who, conscious that they are blinded by sin, pray that they may be giving the sight of which the sin inherent in their nature has robbed them." (Tasker, *John*, p. 121.)

Look at the progression of the blind man again.

<i>Prophet</i>	<i>I admire Him</i>
<i>Sent from God</i>	<i>I think He is more than human</i>
<i>Son of Man</i>	<i>I believe He is God</i>
<i>Lord</i>	<i>I submit and personally believe in Him</i>

I am a part of cohort of pastors that meets in Dallas. These pastors all pastor churches our size and larger and are around my age. We get together every six months. I was there this past week. On my way home I had a businessman sit next to me on the plane for the one-hour flight from Dallas to Kansas City. Right away we got to talking. We started with football. He was from Kansas City, so we talked Chiefs and Bears. We got rolling along pretty good as airplane conversations go; this in spite of him using more profanity in that one hour than I've heard in the last decade. Nearly every sentence and every other word or so was bleep...bleep...bleep...English word...bleep...bleep...bleep.

He eventually asked me, "What do you do for a living?" I told him I was a pastor. I have found most people can magically turn off the profanity. It didn't stop this guy at all. It opened him up. He had gone through a divorce recently. He had a college roommate recently commit suicide. This went on for a while. He went on to tell about another buddy. Remember, this whole time it's... Blankety blank, blankety blank. This buddy of his was really struggling. He said, "I told him to do what I've done. He needed to go to church." I didn't know whether to laugh or not. *Go to church? You've used Jesus' name as profanity multiple times in the last ten minutes but the solution is to go to church?*

Jesus is the Light of the World meaning that the light of His life and teaching and death on the cross for sin – the whole thing unveils Him, but also unveils us. It shows us for who we really are. By His light do we see Him as prophet, God, and Lord leading to "I believe" OR are we blinded to His majesty and refuse to submit to His Lordship? That's seeing. Can you

see Him for who He is today? Do the words of the formerly blind man resonate in your heart, "Lord, I believe!"

For believers here, where are we in the story? Disciples? Nope. Townsfolk? Nope. Pharisees? I hope not. Each Christian here is illustrated in this story by the blind man. We are born spiritually blind and without the light of the gospel of Jesus, we would die blind to Him. But Jesus is a healer and is light and He has given light and sight to all who see Him as prophet, God, and Lord. Christian, I want you to see yourself in the story. A beggar. Without resource. Without hope. And one day, by the hearing of the gospel, Jesus came along your path and caused you to see. Let's rejoice in a Savior who puts mud on the eyes of the blind and causes us to see.

*Amazing Grace – how sweet the sound – that saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost but now am found, Was blind but now I see.*

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