

Jesus and the Man Born Blind

John 9:1-41

Warm-up Question: Have you ever been deprived of any of your five senses for any length of time or broken a bone? How did you cope with this disablement?

¹ As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³ “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴ As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” ⁶ After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. ⁷ “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent”). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing (John 9:1-7).

Imagine living your life without the sense of sight and what challenges that would present to you on a daily basis. One of the most terrifying experiences I have ever known was a time when I was working with my father on his fishing boat, *The Why Worry*. It was afternoon and thick fog had fallen on the entrance to Harwich harbor, our homeport. Harwich was the busiest shipping port on the East coast of England. The fog was so dense that when I held my hand out in front of me I could not see it. We had no radar and could see none of the ships leaving and entering the harbor entrance, which was around 2 miles across. To get to our home berth we had to cross this harbor entrance at the place where it was the busiest. All the other ships had radar, but they were all huge ships and could not maneuver around us. My dad asked me to stand on the foredeck and listen for the sound and direction of any ships, whether they were heading for us or away from us. It was scary because I could hear their horns blowing all around me. My heart skipped a beat at every horn that blew near us. Sound travels deceptively in fog, so any minute I anticipated seeing the bow of a ship bearing down on us. There were sometimes huge ships that would come out from the harbor entrance from the port of Felixstowe. The fear was acute because we had no life preservers on board and if we were to be hit, it would be near impos-

sible for another boat to find us and help us in time, if anything were to happen to us in such thick fog. I don’t know why my dad did not have life preservers on board. Perhaps if you knew him, you would understand. After all, he named his boat the “Why worry”! I smile when I think of that since it was so like my dad. Because we could not see the buoys or the two lighthouses that showed us where the channel was, the only way we knew we were across was when our echo sounder, our depth gauge, told us that we only had a few feet of water under us. No ships could hit us in such shallow water. We breathed a sigh of relief to know we were across the main shipping channel. When you do not have the use of one of your senses, you soon realize how important it is, and how we rely on all of our senses to get through life day to day.

In this session we will meet a man that was blind from birth. As I thought on this passage I felt like the Holy Spirit reminded me of that dark time where we struggled around blindly trying to cross the harbor entrance.

What difficulties do you imagine this man who had been blind from birth faced? (Think of how his life was affected, not just physically, but in other ways too.)

From the beginning of the book that John has written, he has put before us Jesus as the Son of God, the Messiah. Evidence after evidence, sign after sign, and the proof was slowly accumulating as to who Jesus really was—God manifest in the flesh. In the previous chapter He had stated that He was the great I AM (John 8:58), the name God had told Moses that He was to be called by (Exodus 3:14). To the Jewish people, to make such a declaration was unthinkable! How dare He say that He was God! They were so angry at His statements about Himself that they began stoning Him for blasphemy (John 8:59). He had also stated in the previous chapter, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life (John 8:12). He said this about Himself while up in the Temple Courts (John 8:2), more than likely before the four big giant candelabra’s symbolizing God

as the One who had been their light leading them in the darkness during the wilderness wanderings. Notice that He didn't say I am a light, but I am the light of the world. He claimed exclusively to be Israel's Light. Now He is set to prove it as He is leaving the Temple precincts. Often beggars would be sitting near the gates to the temple area, ready to hold out their hands to any worshippers whose hearts were softened by worshiping the Lord. Even today, although there is no temple there, people can often be found begging near one of the gates to the Old City. It seems that Jesus notices the blind man and stops. The disciples ask Him how this man came to be in this condition, having been born blind. "Who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?" (verse 2). The prevailing notion amongst the Jewish people at that time was that God visited upon the children the sins of the parents. In speaking about the worship of false idols, God had said to them:

⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, **punishing the children for the sin of the parents** to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments (Exodus 20:5-6).

They believed that another possible reason as to why he was born blind was that sin could have taken place while in the womb, and hence God had punished him by putting out his eyes while not yet being born. Behind that theory was the story of Esau and Jacob, the sons of Isaac, fighting each other while still in the womb. "The babies jostled each other within her" (Genesis 25:22). Rebekah, their mother was concerned about it enough to go to the Lord in prayer. The disciples wanted to know the cause of the man being born in such a way. The Lord did not enter into the discussion, not being concerned so much with the reason for the man's blindness, but rather, what He was going to do with the opportunity. He saw it as a chance for the Father to vividly demonstrate that whoever was in darkness, should know the Light of life.

The Miracle of Sight to the Blind

Put yourself in the shoes of the man born blind. He could hear the conversation between the Lord and his disciples, but didn't know what was going on. He more than likely heard Jesus collecting spittle in his mouth and spitting it on the ground. I would think that the Lord told him He was about to put something on his eyes.

Did he know who it was before the mud was put on his eyes? I think not. He explained later on, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see" (verse 11). If he would have known Jesus he would have said, "Jesus told me to go to Siloam and wash."

Why didn't Jesus just lay hands on him and heal him instead of making mud from spit? Why was he sent to Siloam to wash the mud off his eyes? Was there no water nearby? What do you think would have happened if the man had not gone?

Sometimes the Lord tests our obedience to His voice. The gospel writer Luke tells us the story of ten lepers who stood at a distance and shouted to Him to have pity on them, what did Jesus do? He shouted for them to go to the priests. He didn't lay hands on them, but gave them something to do that tested their obedience to His word. It was only as they went that they were healed (Luke 17:11-19). It was their faith and obedience to the Lord's word that healed them. Logic would have told them; why go to the priest to get his blessing and permission to enter the community and the synagogue if Jesus had not touched them and healed them? But, in obedience to His word, they walked the distance to see the priests and were healed as they went. Isn't that the way it worked with Naaman the Syrian general? Naaman had leprosy and heard that the prophet Elisha could heal him. So he came to Elisha's house with a big retinue and loads of gold and silver and precious clothes only for Elisha to send out his servant and tell him to go wash in the River Jordan. This lack of respect by Elisha irked Naaman on the inside. He went away angry and offended:

¹¹ But Naaman went away angry and said, "**I thought that he would surely come** out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. ¹² Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" So he turned and went off in a rage. ¹³ Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, **if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it?** How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed'!" ¹⁴ So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy (2 Kings 5:11-14).

The Lord will sometimes offend your mind to reveal your heart. Naaman had preconceived ideas as to how Elisha was going to heal him. The last thing he wanted to do was wash in some small, muddy little river like the River Jordan. But sometimes obedience requires you to obey something that your mind is opposed to. The act of obedience to God will sometimes offend your mind. His ways are higher than our ways:

⁸ “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. ⁹ “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Some people believe that the spittle of a person had healing properties. Certainly this passage is not the only occurrence of Jesus using His spittle to heal a person. In Mark’s gospel, it is recorded that Jesus healed a deaf man after the people wanted the Lord to lay His hands on him. He chose to use a different method:

³² There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and **they begged Jesus to place his hand on him.** ³³ After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man’s ears. **Then he spit and touched the man’s tongue.** ³⁴ He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, “*Ephphatha!*” (which means “Be opened!”). ³⁵ At this, the man’s ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly (Mark 7:32-35).

Has there ever been a time when God had to humble you in order for Him to do something new in your life—a time when initially your pride got in the way? Share your story with those around you.

We are told that the man was sent to the Pool of Siloam to wash. This pool was located on the south side of the Temple Mount but inside the walls of King David’s city of Zion. In the days of King Hezekiah, the king of Assyria, Sennacherib, the king of Assyria had laid siege to Jerusalem. Hezekiah had the sense to shut up the Gihon Spring that was just outside the walls of David’s citadel and build a tunnel 1750 feet (533 meters) to a location called the Pool of Siloam that was inside the city. This tunnel was found in the year 1838 and is used to this day. It is quite an experience to take time to go along the tunnel conduit from the Gihon Spring to the Pool of Siloam. Because of this engineering feat, the city would

always have water, no matter who was besieging the city. The Pool of Siloam got its name because the water was *sent* inside the city—Siloam means sent. The water is still good to taste.

I don’t know how much it offended the man’s mind to be stumbling about with mud on his eyes trying to find his way to the Pool of Siloam in obedience to the word of the Lord, but I’m sure there were a few on the way that probably offered to give him water to wash off his face while he was going. Was there someone leading him the way? We do not know, but no matter what was on the way or who was leading him, he was determined to do just as Jesus had said. He was well rewarded when he was led down the steps to the pool of water. He washed and was instantly healed.

Three Interrogations by the Pharisees

⁸ His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, “Isn’t this the same man who used to sit and beg?” ⁹ Some claimed that he was. Others said, “No, he only looks like him.” But he himself insisted, “I am the man.” ¹⁰ “How then were your eyes opened?” they asked. ¹¹ He replied, “The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.” ¹² “Where is this man?” they asked him. “I don’t know,” he said. ¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. ¹⁴ Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man’s eyes was a Sabbath. ¹⁵ Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. “He put mud on my eyes,” the man replied, “and I washed, and now I see.” ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” But others asked, “How can a sinner perform such signs?” So they were divided. ¹⁷ Then they turned again to the blind man, “What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” The man replied, “He is a prophet.” ¹⁸ They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man’s parents. ¹⁹ “Is this your son?” they asked. “Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?” ²⁰ “We know he is our son,” the parents answered, “and we know he was born blind. ²¹ But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don’t know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself.” ²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ That was why his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.” ²⁴ A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. “Give glory to God by telling the truth,” they said. “We

know this man is a sinner.”²⁵ He replied, “Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!”²⁶ Then they asked him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”²⁷ He answered, “I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?”²⁸ Then they hurled insults at him and said, “You are this fellow’s disciple! We are disciples of Moses!”²⁹ We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don’t even know where he comes from.”³⁰ The man answered, “Now that is remarkable! You don’t know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes.”³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will.³² Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind.³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”³⁴ To this they replied, “You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!” And they threw him out.

I’m sure he began to rejoice at all the things he could see for the first time. Don’t you think he wondered as he looked at the sky, and the green grass and the faces of friends and people he knew only by voice? How wonderful it surely would have been for him to finally see the beauty of God’s creation! This would have caused quite a commotion for all who witnessed this event, as many would have been acquainted with this man, and had probably seen him before, begging at the gates.

It wasn’t long before all hell broke loose because of his healing. His joy was not allowed to continue, for the ultra religious Pharisees were quick to rain on his parade. He was probably well known by many due to his begging at the city gates. People wanted to immediately know what had happened to him, for who had ever heard of someone healing a man blind from birth before. This was particularly significant. Since common thought at that time was that people born blind were blind because of some kind of sin, (theirs, or another’s passed down to them), you can see how this would pose a problem to some. To heal a person born blind would also beg the question; how was this sin problem dealt with? Jesus had healed the blind before this occurrence, but this was the first time that a man was healed who had been blind from birth. They took him to the Pharisees when they heard that it was Jesus who had performed the miracle (verse 13). Perhaps those who took the man to the Pharisees were wondering whether this was the work of the Messiah, or perhaps those who brought him were sympathetic to Jesus and wanted to prove that Je-

sus was who He said He was; the Messiah of Israel.

There was more to this miracle, I believe, than meets the eye. This was a sign to the Israelites that this was indeed the Messiah, and that is why John the apostle goes in great depth about the details of this miracle, and the response following it. The children of Israel believed that the Messiah, when He came, would accomplish at least four things that were prophesied of Him. These things were written down in the prophet Isaiah’s writings:

³ Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; ⁴ say to those with fearful hearts, “Be strong, do not fear; **your God will come**, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you.”⁵ Then will **the eyes of the blind be opened** and the **ears of the deaf unstopped**. ⁶ Then will the **lame leap like a deer**, and the **mute tongue shout for joy** (Isaiah 35:3-6).

This passage above is attributed to the Messiah. When He comes there will be four things that this passage alone says that He will do:

1. He will open the eyes of the blind.
2. He will unstop the ears of the deaf.
3. The lame will be healed
4. The dumb will scream with delight at having a voice again.

This recent healing was too much evidence for the Pharisees to bear. They just did not see or accept that this man was the Messiah. They had believed that the Messiah was a great King who would come riding on a white horse with great power and glory, not this humble person fulfilling scripture by riding into the city on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9). They did not understand that there were two comings of the Messiah, one appearance as a substitute to put away sin, and another as a righteous warrior king who would slay all of His enemies. Even though they had eyes, they refused to see the truth even when it was plain before them. They had seen the four sign miracles before but now this was close up and personal and right inside Jerusalem—their territory!

The Pharisees were spiritually blind to what had just happened. Very conspicuous by its absence is any joy and praise toward God for this man’s healing. One would think that if there were any heart toward good in them that there would be some kind of expression of

emotion, a celebration or a party or something. Even a “Praise God!” or a “Hallelujah!” would not have gone amiss! Instead there was religious controversy, debate and an inquisition. To them their rigid interpretation of the Law prevented them from seeing any good being done on the Sabbath. Jesus had broken their strict interpretation by the following acts:

1. He made clay on the Sabbath. Mixing saliva with dirt was regarded as kneading, which constituted working on the Sabbath according to them.
2. It was forbidden to heal on the Sabbath. Only if one’s life was in actual danger could one heal on the Sabbath.

They quickly came to the conclusion that this healing could not have happened. Their opinion was that Jesus was a sinner because He had broken their interpretation of the Law. There had to be some other explanation. First of all they tried to explain it away by saying that it was not the man that was born blind. But he himself insisted, “I am the man” (verse 9). They wanted an explanation for what had happened, perhaps thinking that this was all a big con trick. In his response he is an excellent example to us. He might not be able to theologize and put it all together, but he testifies to what he knows and let the chips fall where they may. He shares his story of just what happened to him. We ourselves may not be able to debate with people concerning the power of the Gospel, but we can simply share our story of what happened to us. Often people that are religious or in bondage to a cult, just have no answer to a testimony of God’s power in one’s life.

I remember just after becoming a Christian, I went back to my hometown and felt like I had to do something to share my faith. I wanted to share this good news I had found with whoever I could. I went on the streets of a nearby busy town and just starting talking to people about Christ and handing out tracts. I met a couple that seemed to be intrigued by me, and wanted me to come to their place where they were having a meeting...I thought they were Christians so I went with them. When I got to the place where they were meeting, I was struck by how little joy they had in their lives. I had recently been saved and God had come close to me in a very personal way and filled me with His Spirit. I got a chance to testify to them of my experience of being touched by the Lord but there was just something missing in them. Their response was one of quoting passages in their re-

ligious books. It was only after I had left that I found out that they were people in a false cult. It was like I was aware inside that something was wrong, but it was their lack of joy that shocked me. What did get their attention was my testimony about how God had worked in my life. I could see that the words were having an effect on them. Never underestimate the power of just simply telling your story of Christ’s work in your life. Often it is the very thing that people are looking for. Logic fails people who try and explain away the power of God at work in a person’s life.

The Pharisees question his parents about this man’s healing. They just could not believe that this man was born blind. “Is this your son? they asked” (verse 19). John adds a side note to help us understand why the parents would acknowledge him as their son, but not add any details as to what had happened, 22His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. 23That was why his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.” It is impossible for many of us that live in secular western nations to understand what it meant for a Jewish person in that culture to be put out of the synagogue. This meant that others Jews were to not associate with them at all. Everything revolved around community with others, with the synagogue just being part of it. It meant a lonely existence. The blind man’s parents did not want to go there, they said, “He is of age, let him speak for himself.”

The underlying thing that is going on in this story is that the Pharisees were using threats and intimidation against anyone placing their trust and belief that Jesus was the Messiah. They struggled to build their case against Jesus, but the man who had been healed would not be intimidated, and would not back down. They summoned him again saying,

“Give glory to God by telling the truth,” they said. “We know this man is a sinner.”²⁵ He replied, “Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!”

Have you ever felt interrogated regarding your faith or a spiritual experience? What was your response? What was the outcome?

Give glory to God was an expression used in cross-ex-

amination. “Tell us the truth,” they were saying. “Have a clear conscience before God.” But this man was not intimidated in the slightest. He didn’t care if he was to be ex-communicated. He had gone through much worse things in his life of blindness. We see in him such a heart for the truth and for the One who had healed him. He would stay faithful to share what had happened and not back down. “What did He do to you?” they said. The healed man sees through their entire sham inquisition. They do not want the truth; they just want to destroy his testimony.

²⁷ He answered, “I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?”

Here he nails his colors to the mast. Here is where I belong! With the word “too” he is stating whose disciple he will be. He says; “I will be a disciple of Christ! Will you be His disciple too?” With great anger the Pharisees call down curses upon him and bar him from the synagogue. These curses were words that were spoken whenever anyone had departed from following the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 11:28). They were not merely swearing at this man, they were officially shunning him from the community. From this point forward, a man who had been at the mercy of others in the community for his livelihood would no longer be able to live that way. His story, his proclamation was perhaps a costly statement to make. But he could not deny what had happened to him. He simply told the truth. When God intercepts our lives and we have an encounter with Him, it is only the beginning. This man’s life was to change in ways that he could not have imagined when that mud was placed on his eyes.

How do you think this man’s life may have changed from this point forward, aside from his physical state? What issues do you think this may have posed for others in the community?

Two Kinds of Blindness

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

³⁶ “Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him.” ³⁷ Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.” ³⁸ Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.

³⁹ Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.” ⁴⁰ Some Pharisees who were with him heard him

say this and asked, “What? Are we blind too?” ⁴¹ Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains (John 9:1-41).

How I love verse thirty-five! It is so like the Lord who is our Shepherd; when the man was thrown out of fellowship, guess who came seeking him? The Lord sought for him and found him. The Lord Jesus brought him who had been cast out of the community of faith and brought him into fellowship with Himself. He cares for His lost sheep that have strayed from the flock. “Do you believe in the Son of Man”, he said to him? The words, “*Son of Man*” was a Messianic term given to the One who should come, first mentioned in the Book of Daniel (Daniel 7:13). The King James Version renders it this way; “Do you believe on the Son of God?” The Lord says that He has come into the world so those who are blind will see and those who see will become blind (verse 38). Every encounter that a man or woman has with the person of Jesus either drives us closer to Him or pushes us further away. Notice the progression of this man’s faith. In verse 11 his statement about Jesus is; “the man they call Jesus.” But as he deepens in the revelation of who Jesus is, he calls Jesus “a prophet” (verse 17), and further on at the end of his encounter, he says; “Lord, I believe” and worships Him. At the other end of the spectrum, to those whose hearts are closed and will not believe, they become spiritually blind. Their response to Jesus is; “What? Are we blind too?” They were expecting a “no” from the Lord, but they didn’t get it! They were spiritually blind! When an individual stubbornly refuses to see the truth of Jesus and who He is, yes, they will become spiritually and further entrenched in their sin—their guilt remains. Not only could they not see Jesus for who He truly is, they could not see their own true selves or the sin of self righteousness that kept them from Him. They were blind to spiritual things, even though in their mind, they believed they were the most spiritual people in the community. When the power of God is revealed, you will always see a direct challenge and struggle. The wonderful healing of this man who had been blind would have immediately posed a question for those who believed what they saw. Would they stand with this blind man and believe that God had indeed healed him? Or would they shun him and align themselves in agreement with the Pharisees? Once again, Jesus, in bringing His light into a situation, cannot help but reveal the darkness. His very actions posed a question each person had to

answer. Religion can be so blinding and binding in its stubbornness to the truth. Pray for a pliable sensitive heart to always walk in His knowledge and truth.

Prayer: Father, please keep my eyes open to the truth

as it is found in your word. Please grant me a sensitive spirit to respond to you in the same way as this man who was born blind. You loved him enough to step into his life and change it forever. Help me to be open to You and to be true to You also, as he was. Amen!