

John's Gospel - Lighten Our Darkness

by John Vissers

Jesus heals a man born blind to display the work of God in his life, and the Pharisees interrogate him and his parents to try to understand the miracle and determine if Jesus is breaking the Sabbath laws.

Duration: 38:12

Scripture: John 9:1-39

Topics: "Darkness"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the story of Jesus healing a blind man in John chapter 9. The first section of the passage describes how Jesus puts mud on the man's eyes and instructs him to wash in the pool of Siloam, resulting in the man's ability to see. The second section involves the Pharisees interrogating the man and his parents to understand what happened. The preacher emphasizes that our weakest and most vulnerable moments can become opportunities for God's grace to be revealed. The sermon concludes with Jesus comforting the man and confronting the Pharisees, highlighting the themes of faith and judgment. The preacher connects this story to Jesus being the light of the world and the twofold effect of his coming, bringing salvation to the spiritually blind and judgment to those who reject the light.

Transcript

Lord, we are here. Our hearts are open before you. Our souls are restless and hunger and thirst after you.

Our minds perhaps filled with many things from the world. We pray this evening that as we study your word that you would speak to us. That you would change our hearts, that you would challenge our minds, that you would feed our souls.

That indeed you would feed us on your word so that we might be nourished to serve you and to live for you in the week to come. Through Christ our Lord we pray. Amen.

I want to read tonight the ninth chapter of John's Gospel, chapter 9, and reading all 41 verses. If you would like to follow along, I invite you to do so either in your own Bibles or in the Pew Bible. This is a marvelous story.

The story of Jesus healing a man born blind and the events that followed that healing. And we want to look at this episode in John's Gospel together tonight. So John chapter 9 at verse 1. As he, that is Jesus, went

along he saw a man blind from birth.

His disciples asked him, Rabbi, who sinned? This man or his parents that he was born blind? Neither this man nor his parents sinned, said Jesus. But this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me.

Night is coming when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world. Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes.

Go, he told him, wash in the pool of Siloam. This word means sent. So the man went and washed and came home seeing.

His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg? Some claimed that he was, others said no, he only looks like him. But he himself insisted, I am the man. How then were your eyes opened, they demanded.

He replied, the man they called 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.

Where is this man, they asked him. I don't know, he said. They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind.

Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. 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.

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 do such miraculous signs? So they were divided. Finally, 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. The Jews still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents.

Is this your son, they asked. Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now we can see? We know he is our son, the parents answered, and we know he was born blind. 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. His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for already the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue. That was why his parents said, he is of age, ask him.

A second time, they summoned the man who had been born blind. Give glory to God, they said, we know this man is a sinner. 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. Then they asked him, what did he do to you? How did he open your eyes? He answered, I've told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too? Then they hurled insults at him and said, you are this fellow's disciple.

We are disciples of Moses. We know that God spoke to Moses. But as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from.

The man answered, now that is remarkable. You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners.

He listens to the godly man who does his will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.

To this, they replied, you were steeped in sin at birth. How dare you lecture us? And they threw him out. Jesus heard that they had thrown him out.

And when he found him, he said, do you believe in the Son of Man? Who is he, sir? The man asked, tell me so that I may believe in him. Jesus said, you have now seen him. In fact, he is the one speaking with you.

Then the man said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him. Jesus said, for judgment I have come into this world so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.

Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, what are we blind to? And Jesus said, if you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin. But now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains. Amen.

May God bless to us this reading from his word tonight. It's really a remarkable story, really a remarkable episode in the life of Jesus and in the life of this particular man. The ninth chapter of John's Gospel describes the healing of a man born blind.

And the passage really, as you can see, divides quite easily into three main sections. In the first section, verses 1 to 12, we have the initial encounter of Jesus with this man who was born blind. And Jesus heals him.

He puts some mud on his eyes and tells him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. And he does it. He's obedient.

And he who was once blind is now able to see. And then in the second section of this passage, what happens is a kind of lengthy interrogation, three interrogations, really, where the Pharisees intercede and interview, interrogate the man. And then they interrogate the man's parents.

And then they come back and interrogate this man yet a second time to try to get at the root of what's been happening, to try to get some understanding of what's going on, an interesting interrogation and conversation. And then the third and final section in verses 35 to 41, we see Jesus speaking to the man after the man's been thrown out by the religious leaders. He's comforted and confronted by Jesus and encounters Jesus there, expresses faith.

And again, Jesus has a word as well for the Pharisees, for the religious leaders, about faith and judgment. Now, this chapter is connected with Jesus' earlier teaching at the Feast of Tabernacles. And it's connected very much at the very beginning in verse 5, where Jesus says, While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

And of course, this is an explicit connection with John chapter 8 and verse 12, when during the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus got up during the lighting of the lamps in the temple and says, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. And so this theme of light, again, continues in John's gospel.

Jesus is the one who brings light into a dark world. But now we see the theme developed in a slightly different way and in a slightly new direction, because the healing of this blind man sets the stage for a discussion, really, and for the development of the theme about spiritual blindness and spiritual sight. Yes, Jesus is the light of the world.

That's already been made clear in the 8th chapter of John's gospel. It's reaffirmed now in the 9th chapter of John's gospel in this episode. But now it's developed a little bit further, because what we understand now is that the coming of the light has a two-fold effect.

It brings salvation to those who are spiritually blind and who will receive the light, who will come to the light. But it also brings the shadow of judgment to those who think they know, but who will not come to the light. Now, this is a theme which is also very much an Old Testament theme and one that is developed as well through the gospel of John.

One of the marks of the Messianic age is that the blind will receive their sight. And, of course, Jesus healed many blind people. But in Isaiah 29, for example, verse 18, we read these words.

In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see. Or in Isaiah 35 and verse 5, then the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. You see, one of the themes that's being developed now is that in the age of the Messiah, the blind will receive their sight.

It will be a time of sight. It will be a time of revelation. What was unseen will now be seen.

What had been hidden will be revealed. And that's very much now the theme that's developed in this chapter, that Jesus is the Messiah, the Great I Am, the one who comes to give sight to the blind, to bring light to those who are in darkness. Again, a development of Jesus' identity, his messianic identity, that he is indeed the Son of Man.

Now, in looking at this chapter very briefly tonight, I want us to think about it from the perspective of the man who was healed, from the perspective of the man who was born blind, because this passage and the teaching of this passage really revolves around him. That is to say, it revolves around how Jesus sees him. It revolves around what Jesus does for him.

It revolves around how the religious leaders respond to what Jesus does for him. It's his blindness. It's his healing.

It's his witness, his testimony, and ultimately his faith at the end of this chapter, which is the thread that runs throughout the entire chapter. So let's look at it from his perspective, if we can, and try to just see what this teaching is in this chapter as we consider the portrait which is painted of this man who was born blind. Now, the first thing I want to suggest to you tonight is that Jesus sees this man as someone in whose life the work of God might be displayed.

Verses 1 to 12, Jesus sees this man as someone in whose life the work of God might be displayed. Now, the opening verses here set the scene as Jesus went along, he saw a man blind from birth. Now, the interesting thing is that the disciples right away want to know who is responsible for this.

For them, as for Jews at that time and for many others since, the answer is simple. Personal suffering of this nature is due to sin. Personal suffering of this nature is due to sin.

And the only real question concerns who is directly responsible. In other words, if this personal suffering of this blindness is due to sin, then the only question really is who is responsible for this man's blindness. And the options were rather clear.

Either that this man committed sin before he was born, while he was still in the womb, or else his parents committed some sin before his birth. In other words, his blindness, the suffering is a result of his own sin, or he is the victim of his parents' sin. And the disciples assume that he must be blind, that he must be suffering because he is being punished.

Now, there's a long tradition in rabbinic teaching, in fact, and rabbinic discussions around this very point. And so it's not all that unusual, or all that unexpected, really, that the disciples would raise this question. They want to hear from Jesus why this man was born blind.

Now, we need to understand, I think, that the Bible indeed does allow a general relationship between sin and suffering. If you look at the accounts of the opening chapter of Genesis, in Genesis chapter 3, the fall into sin, Genesis 3 makes it clear that suffering and death entered the world through sin. The Apostle Paul affirms that, teaches that in Romans chapter 5. Sin has produced a suffering world.

Sin has produced a reality in which we suffer, and in which people suffer from all kinds of different afflictions. But the Bible, and this is an important point, the Bible refuses to permit this idea to be individualized in every case. An individual's personal suffering is not always attributable to his or her personal sin.

The Bible makes it very clear that the sin and the suffering of our lives is far more complex. It's far more complicated than that. Sometimes, of course, the reality is, and we know this from our experience, that we do suffer as a result of some sinful action, as a result of some sinful decision.

We may, for example, be involved in drunken driving and create an accident that will have and create suffering for us or for others. It may be through sexual promiscuity, may be through all kinds of things that may bring suffering into our lives. But the point is this, you can't generalize from this.

Most of the time, our suffering is the result of living in a fallen world. And this was the issue, in fact, if you go back to the book of Job, the issue at discussion between Job and his friends. The lesson of the book of Job is that Job's friends were no comfort to him.

They couldn't provide the answers. They had simplistic answers. They assumed that since Job was suffering, he must have been doing something wrong.

He must be being punished. And if he simply repented, then the punishment and the suffering would cease. But the lesson of the book of Job is that such a simplistic theology is not in line with God's expressed will.

And so this opening conversation already challenges, I think, much of our thinking about how Jesus works in our hearts and in our lives. This kind of simplistic theology of suffering, of course, abounds everywhere today. It's a popular basis of popular religion.

If you are suffering, you are being punished. And if you are being punished, you must have done something wrong. You see it, for example, in New Age teaching today, in the teaching of reincarnation.

The New Age gurus would have us believe that the problems we face here and now have everything to do with what has happened in some previous existence. We are being punished or rewarded for the way in which we lived in some past life. And the Christian faith clearly rejects, of course, any notion of reincarnation, but also it rejects the idea that permeates it, that somehow you can make this simplistic equation.

We also see this theology at work today, of course, in some theologies of healing. There is a simplistic correspondence between sin and suffering. For a sick person to be made well, it is necessary for them, simply we say, to repent of their sins or their unbelief or their broken relationships or their unwillingness to thank God for their illness or whatever.

If they'll simply do something, they can get out from under the suffering. Like so many heresies, of course, there is a kernel of truth here. There is a grain of truth.

Some sickness may have some relationship to realities in our lives, and dealing with them may be a factor in the healing process. But the Bible never generalizes on this. The Bible never makes this a universal principle.

We should never make it a universal principle across the board so that all personal sickness and all personal suffering is related to personal sin. It is inhumane, and according to scripture, it is heretical. And it is dismissed by Jesus in this passage.

Notice instead what Jesus says in verse 3. He says, neither this man nor his parents sinned. Now, that's not the answer his disciples would have expected. That's not the answer that one would expect in the rabbinic tradition.

But here Jesus is saying very clearly, neither this man nor his parents sinned. Rather, this happened so that the work of God might be displayed. It's an astonishing statement.

What Jesus is saying is, in a world of sin, in a world of suffering, in a fallen world where we face these realities in our lives every day, this man's blindness is going to be an occasion for the glory of God to be displayed. It is going to be an opportunity for the revelation of Jesus. His life, Jesus is saying, is going to be a canvas upon which I, the Lord of the universe, am going to paint a work of grace.

His life is going to become a portrait of faith. His life will become a sign of the messianic age. And I want to suggest to you by way of application that the same thing is often true in our own lives, that we need to see suffering, that we need to see the realities that confront us day in and day out as opportunities for the grace of God to be revealed.

In the midst of our sin, in the midst of our suffering, in the midst of our weakness and our frailty, in the midst of the things we bump up against in life, in the midst of sickness and even death itself, our lives can become, by God's grace, through the work of Jesus in us, an occasion for the glory of God. It may not

always be in the ways that we expect. It may not always be even in the ways that we desire.

It may not always be in the ways that we can at first understand. But the truth is real, that our lives can become an occasion, an opportunity, sometimes at our weakest moments, at our most vulnerable moments, at those times when we feel that we're down and we're out, when there's no place to go. It's at those moments that our lives can often become an opportunity for God's grace to be revealed.

And so it was for this man. His life became an opportunity that the work of God might be displayed. And notice the urgency with which Jesus says this.

Night is coming. It's important that this work be displayed. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

But secondly, we've got to move on very quickly here. I want you to notice the Pharisees and how they look at this man. Jesus looks at this man as someone in whose life the glory of God may be revealed and displayed.

How do the Pharisees look at him? The Pharisees see this man, and after he's healed, they now see him as someone whose life is to be judged. This man is clearly a problem. His healing is clearly a problem.

He's a problem for the Pharisees. After Jesus heals the man, his neighbors, that is the man's neighbors, are confused. So they bring him to the Pharisees.

And when the Pharisees hear that this healing has taken place on the Sabbath, they've got a real problem. Because in their eyes now, Jesus has broken the Sabbath tradition in at least two ways. First of all, he's healed on the Sabbath.

And the only possible exception on the Sabbath for a healing was, in fact, if a life was being threatened. If a life was in danger of being lost, then a healing could take place on the Sabbath. Otherwise, healing on the Sabbath was forbidden.

And you'll know, of course, that Jesus got into trouble for this a number of times in the Gospels. He got into trouble for healing on the Sabbath. But secondly, the Sabbath laws and rituals and regulations were so strict that even by making the mud, by taking some saliva and making mud and putting it on this blind man's eyes, even that was contrary to the Sabbath.

Very specific. Jesus was doing something with mud. He was kneading it.

He was putting it together in such a way that it contradicted the Sabbath law. So the Pharisees treat this matter very seriously. They want to get at the truth.

And so they set up a series of interviews, a series of interrogations. Some of the Pharisees immediately conclude that Jesus could not be from God, that this miracle could not be from God because he does not keep the Sabbath. But the man's account of his own healing is so persuasive that some of the Pharisees seem impressed.

I mean, how could a sinner do such miraculous signs? It doesn't make sense. If Jesus is a sinner and he's breaking the Sabbath, but how can a sinner do such miraculous signs? And as they continue their interrogation, the man who's healed tells them what he thinks. This man, he says that his Jesus is a prophet.

Well, that's not enough. They want to make sure, in fact, that this man was really healed, that he'd really been born blind. So they go and find his parents.

They want to confirm his identity. They want to confirm that he'd been born blind. The parents confirm these two facts.

But they refuse to say how their son gained his sight. Why? Because they were afraid of what the Pharisees might do. So what happens? They go back to the man again and they ask him what happened.

In verse 25, we find this marvelous testimony. The man says, Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. But one thing I know.

I was blind, but now I see. I can't answer all of your theological questions. I don't know all the rules and all the regulations about the Sabbath.

I don't know whether this man is a sinner or not. I don't know whether what you're saying about him is true or not. I don't know whether what others are saying about him is true or not.

But this one thing I know. I was blind, but now I see. I was in darkness, but now it is light.

I was in deep darkness, and now my eyes have been opened. And once they hear the testimony of this man, once he testifies concerning his experience, the religious leaders hurl insults at him. It becomes ugly.

They reject his testimony and they throw him out. Now, I want you to notice two things here just by way of application. First of all, the power of this man's testimony, the power of this man's experience.

He had a real encounter with Jesus in his life, and it made a profound difference. He was never the same again. And he could speak about it from the depths of his own soul, from the depths of his experience.

But secondly, we can't ponder this passage without asking deep and disturbing questions about the Pharisees. Because the Pharisees are really tragic figures. And you see, it's easy for us to identify with the man who'd been born blind and who was healed.

We'd like to stand where he stands. We'd like to kind of identify with him. But let's identify with the Pharisees for a moment.

They considered themselves students of the scriptures. They were zealots for pious behavior. They prayed and they fasted.

They were frequently in the temple. They gave sacrificially to God's work. Yet they were among the principal instruments in the hands of Satan in opposing Jesus.

Why? They tried to explain away the work of God in the ministry of Jesus. They tried to stamp out the grace of God at work in this man's life. And we must always ask ourselves, is there a danger that we stand where these religious leaders stand? Are we consumed by the kind of spiritual pride that consumed them? Is our God too small? Do we spend more time judging others than rejoicing in the work of God's grace in their lives? You see, when we stand in this kind of judgment of others, we're always in danger of standing not just in judging others, but in judging the work of God itself.

The most awful of sins in rejecting the authentic testimony of a fellow believer, we are rejecting the one about whom the testimony is made. And so the religious leaders see this man as someone to be judged, as someone to be stamped upon, somehow to stamp out the grace of God, the joy, the newfound life that he's discovered. And then finally, the passage ends with Jesus again seeing this man and pointing to this man as an example of faith, of real faith, of genuine faith.

The faith was already at work in verses 1 to 12 when Jesus tells the man to go to the pool of Siloam and wash. The man does it obediently. He says in response to the interrogation of the Pharisees, I'm not sure who this man is, but one thing I know, I once was blind, but now I can see.

But in verse 38, we reach the high point, the confession of this man. He says, Lord, I believe. Jesus asks him whether he believes in the Son of Man.

Jesus says, I am the one who is speaking to you. And the man says, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped Jesus.

You see, what's happening here is this encounter with Jesus, this experience of Jesus is now informed by the word of Jesus, is now informed by this conversation with Jesus, is now informed by the teaching of Jesus. And you can see, because he's met the Son of Man, the Messiah, Jesus, he didn't understand that at first. When he first was healed, he didn't understand the fullness of what had happened.

But now he's moved from someone who experienced the work of Jesus in his life to a genuine believer. And I want to suggest to you that there is an important principle here. There's an important reality at work.

You see, it's never enough to focus on our experience. It is important to remember that our experience is never enough in itself. Experience may be a starting point.

It may be a starting point for faith. We may have some encounter with Jesus. We may have some traumatic experience in life which drives us toward God.

But the experience in and of itself is not enough. It is not faith. In response to the Pharisees, the man could say, I was blind, but now I see.

That's perhaps the beginning of faith, but it's not faith itself because faith is much more than that. Faith is not faith in our experience of God. It is rather faith in God himself.

And faith does not simply rest on our experience of Jesus, but faith is faith in the person and in the work of Jesus Christ. That experience now has been shaped by Jesus, by his teaching, by his word. Calvin describes faith as a sure and certain knowledge of the promises of God.

And a sure and certain knowledge of the promises of God is a sure and certain knowledge whether we feel it, whether we experience it or not. Real faith is rooted, which says, I believe and worships Jesus as Lord and as God, whether we feel it all the time or not. This man had a profound encounter, a profound experience of Jesus.

But it wasn't faith itself. That faith came when he bowed the knee and confessed, Yes, Lord, I believe. And in contrast, of course, the passage ends with a stark, stark comparison because the Pharisees are models of unbelief, of unfaith.

The man who is blind is the one who really sees. He makes the confession that Jesus is Lord. And the Pharisees, who can see, who should have seen, who should have known, who know the scriptures, who had everything given to them, Jesus says, they are the ones who are really blind.

And so again, we see the values of the kingdom of God turning everything upside down. This man who is blind is the one who can really see. The Pharisees, who should be the ones who should have seen, they're the ones who are in the dark.

And that, Jesus says, makes their guilt great. They should have known, but they wouldn't. They wouldn't know.

And so it's this contrast, this stark contrast on which this passage concludes. And the question I want to ask you is simply this. Where are you standing tonight? As one who is in the light and rejoicing in the light, or as one who stands in the darkness? As one who's encountered and experienced Jesus? As one who can say, yes, he is Lord and God of my life? Or as one who stands in the darkness, who stands where the Pharisees stand, not being able to see? Jesus is waiting, and he's waiting to lighten our darkness.

I am the light of the world. While I am in the world, Jesus says, I am the light of the world. And whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

May God open our eyes to see the reality of the work of Jesus in our hearts. Let's pray together. Lord, we confess tonight that some of us stand, perhaps, where this man born blind stood.

We need to have you touch our lives in some profound way, because we are struggling, and we are suffering, and we are confused, and we are in darkness. And so come and touch our eyes, that we might see you afresh, and that we might know you and your love. Father, some of us tonight here may be standing where the Pharisees were standing.

We think we know the way. We think we know how to negotiate and navigate our way through this life. And we want to turn aside from Jesus, because we don't really understand how he can be the light.

Father, pierce our darkness this night, and help us to see Jesus in a new, and in a clear, and in a living way. So wherever we stand this night, O God, touch us by your grace. For we ask it in the name of our Savior.

Amen.

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