

Was Blind But Now I See

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John 9:1-8

¹ *As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth.* ² *And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"* ³ *Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him."* ⁴ *We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work.* ⁵ *As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."* ⁶ *Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud* ⁷ *and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.* ⁸ *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?"*

"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me." These are first words of the first verse of one of the greatest hymns ever written, "Amazing Grace." They're the testimony of John Newton, who lived in the 18th Century, grew up in a Christian home, was pressed into service in the brutal British navy, devoted himself to a sinful life, became a captain of slave ships, but then came to saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ when his ship was sinking in a violent, life-threatening storm and he called out to God to save him

The first verse goes on to say, "I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see." These last words, "was blind, but now I see," are a quotation of another man's testimony - a beggar born blind that Jesus healed. And as we just read, the account of his healing is given in the 9th chapter of the Gospel of John.

I love this account, for a number of reasons. One is that there are a couple of things in it that are actually humorous to me.

First of all, think about how this guy was healed. If you're familiar with the Gospels, you know that Jesus healed a number of blind people, and most often He would speak a word, or touch the blind person's eyes. That's not what He did here. He spits on the ground, makes a kind of mud, puts it on the man's eyes, and then tells him to go wash it off. O. K, I think I'd be washing it off too, wouldn't you?

Then, after washing it off, the man is healed, and when he comes back to his neighborhood where he grew up and begged for most of his life, his neighbors don't even recognize him. I mean, it's not like in our culture, where you see someone in church, and then see them somewhere else, like Costco, and think, "Hmm, that guy looks familiar. I know I know him, but where? O yeah, in church!" No, it wasn't that way, it was his neighborhood! But he's so completely changed from being a beggar born blind to seeing, that some of his neighbors don't recognize him. Verses 8 and 9 say, "*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?"*" ⁹ *Some said, "It is he."* *Others said, "No, but he is like him."* *He kept saying, "I am the man."* I can just see him keep on arguing and saying, "I'm the man. I am the man. I'm telling you, I'm the man."

A second reason I love this is not humorous. It's serious - deadly serious, in fact, it's eternal life and death serious. That's because this chapter is all about what we believe about Who Jesus is, and that is the most serious thing there is. This is because what you believe about Who Jesus is will determine your eternal destiny.

Then a third reason I love this is because it has often caused me to wonder how many people would really want God choose them to do a miracle in their life. What do I mean by that? Wouldn't everyone want to volunteer for God to do a miracle in their life? Well, I really don't know.

A few years ago, when I was pastoring a church, there was a group of us who were committed to pray Saturday nights for revival and for the Sunday worship service the next day. And one faithful brother in his zeal for God would always pray for God to do signs, wonders and miracles, and, especially that he would raise someone from the dead. So, one night, after hearing this for many weeks, I said, "So you want God to raise someone from the dead. Why don't you volunteer to die and then God raise you?" He said, "Oh, no, when I get to heaven, I'm not coming back" So much for volunteering for God to choose you to do a miracle in your life.

And that brings us to this beggar born blind. He didn't volunteer - he was chosen by God. And for what purpose? Jesus said clearly, "*That the works of God might be displayed in his life?*"

The Greek word that is inconspicuously translated "that" is "*hina*" and means "for the purpose of." God chose Him for the express and specific purpose to reveal His work in this man's life. He was "volunteered" by God for God's purposes. And the purpose was that in and through him Jesus could display and manifest the reality of the glorious truth that He is the Light of the World

Now when we look at this account of the healing of this beggar born blind, and how it progresses through the chapter, we can see that there are 3 key questions. First, who sinned that this man was born blind? Second, how were his eyes opened? Then third, these culminate with the most critical question: What do you say about Jesus?

First, then, who sinned that this man was born blind?

Now as the chapter begins, Jesus and His disciples have left the temple area after an extended dispute with the Jewish religious leaders that began with Jesus declaring that He is the Light of the world, and ended with them picking up stones to stone Him because He was claiming to God. So now He proves it.

We read in verses 1 and 2, *As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth.* ² *And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"*

John, the writer of this gospel, who was an eyewitness of what happened, doesn't tell us why they asked the question. And while the answer to the question is the most important thing, it's intriguing to me why the disciples even asked Jesus the question. Why would they think He knew the answer? They are asking a question that only God could answer. Why would they think Jesus would know whether this man was born blind was because of his own sin, even sin in his mother's womb before he was born, or the sin of his parents?

Now the disciples, being devote religious Jews, knew what the Scriptures revealed → that sickness and disease are often a consequence and ultimately connected to sin. So, the disciples gave Jesus two options: either this man sinned or his parents. Characteristically manifesting supernatural knowledge, Jesus says there is another reason: "*It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him*"

I have heard people interpret Jesus' answer to say that He categorically rejects and overturns the belief that sickness is in any way a consequence or connected to sin. He didn't. He simply says that *this* man's blindness was not God's judicial judgment for his own personal sin, a sin that could actually take place while in the womb, which is a reality that those who minister in what is called "inner healing" know takes place. And He says this man's blindness was not God's judicial judgment for the generational sin of his parents, something that God Himself says is a reality in His very own words in the 2nd Commandment. No, Jesus says it is for the express purpose that the works of God would be manifested in him. This is, in fact, what the Bible reveals can take place, and the foremost example of it is in the life of Job, whom God Himself said was the most righteous man on the earth, but, nevertheless, for God's own glory allowed Satan to attack with a dreadful disease.

But these things aren't the point of this account. It is Jesus giving sight to the beggar born blind to demonstrate and prove that He is the Light of the World. What this beggar born blind illustrates is the reality that all people are spiritually bankrupt and blind from birth. That is what the Greek emphasizes, for the Greek word translated by the ordinary word "from," in "from birth," is "*ek*," which means "out of," or originating from birth.

Spiritual bankruptcy and blindness are a reality that originates out of birth from the moment of conception. It originates out of our fallen, sinful human nature as a consequence of the sin of our first parent, Adam. None of us is born spiritually bankrupt and blind because we volunteered to be. It is the devastating consequence of original sin that blinds the eyes of our hearts so that, left to ourselves, like a blind beggar on the side of the road, we cannot see God and know the truth of God.

A blind person has no ability and power to see. A person born blind can physically open their eyes their whole life and look at the sun, but they will never see the light of the sun because they can't see the light. And no amount of mere mental knowledge has power to make a person born spiritually blind to be able to see. It's not as if, being a blind person, you can knock on a door and tell those behind it that you are in the darkness wanting light, and then, entering through the door into a room that those in the room can tell you secret knowledge that will make you see and know the truth about God. No, you must have a

supernatural work of God's power to make the blind eyes of your heart to see. Just as Jesus says, it's *the work of God*. And that supernatural work of God displays and manifests the glory of the grace of God that makes a blind person see Jesus Christ, the Light of the World.

That bring us to the second question: How were his eyes opened?

This is the predominate question running through the account, and the answer to this question is essential. The question is actually asked five times by virtually every group of influence: the man's neighbors, the religious authorities the Pharisees, and his family. It's the principal point that this healing demonstrates: *how* the eyes of the heart of a person born spiritually bankrupt and blind are opened. And the answer is simply this: he washed.

But this one act of washing has two essential elements. While second is clear, the first is often not so obvious, but is, nevertheless, as plain as the light of day. The first essential element of how his eyes were opened is the grace of God.

There are many ways grace is defined: unmerited mercy, unearned favor, undeserved kindness. Whatever way we may define it, it means that, because of God's sovereign choice to act in love and kindness, He freely gives us what we are not entitled to or deserve.

This man's healing was not a result of him first coming to Jesus and asking to be healed. It was the result of Jesus first going to him. Just as he did not choose to be born blind, but God chose him to display His power, so also, he did not first choose to go to Jesus, but Jesus chose him to display His grace. He's a blind beggar that they're passing by and, in the providence of God, they stop to talk about him! There's nothing he first does to cause Jesus to heal him. It's because of the amazing grace of God that Jesus chooses to initiate healing in his body and salvation in his heart.

It is this grace that then leads to the second essential element: He had to believe and obey the word of Jesus to go and be washed. Verse 7: *Jesus said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam." So he went and washed and came back seeing.* Verse 11: *He said, "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."*

These are the two essential elements of this man's healing. First, the grace of God that initiates healing and salvation. Second, believing and obeying the word of Jesus. These are the two essential elements of how we are saved, and it is illustrated in unmistakable ways in the Gospel of John.

In chapter five, Jesus enters to a place where there is a multitude of sick people and Personally goes to a man who has no idea of Who Jesus is, has been paralyzed from 38 years, laying on his pallet for a long time, and Jesus asks him if he wants to be healed. Jesus, in grace, first comes to him, and then Jesus tells him, "Pick up your pallet and walk." And when he did, he was healed. First, grace, then believe and obey what Jesus says.

In chapter eleven, we read about Lazarus who is dead, bound, and buried for four days, and as his sister said, "Is stinking by now." Jesus calls out, "Lazarus, come forth." Lazarus is made alive. And being made alive, believes and obeys the word of Jesus and comes out of the tomb raised from the dead. Lazarus had no power to raise himself from dead. First was grace, then He believed and obeyed what Jesus said.

The beggar born blind was healed first because Jesus chose to initiate healing. And because he believed what Jesus said, he obeyed His word. Merely hearing the word of Jesus is not enough. We must believe in our hearts and obey His word

This illustrates that true faith, what the Bible calls "saving faith," acts in obedience to Jesus. We must personally choose to believe and obey Him to be washed and healed to be able to see with our hearts and saved from our sins. It is Jesus Who washes from our sin us by His blood that was poured out on the cross and heals us by the power of the Holy Spirit Who opens the eyes of our hearts to see and actually know God.

The supernatural healing of this blind man illustrates what is written in the third chapter of John that Jesus told a man named Nicodemus, who was a ruler of the Jews and the teacher of Israel. If anyone had human abilities, influence and knowledge about the things of God, Nicodemus did. But as John symbolically states, he came to Jesus at night, meaning in spiritual darkness, in effect, knocking at Jesus' door for Jesus to give him true knowledge of God. And so, Jesus tells him the only way he is going to be able to actually and personally know the reality of God in his life was to be "*born of water and the Spirit*" (John 3:5). He had to have God supernaturally work by the power of the Holy Spirit to wash and cleanse Him from the sin that blinds him from birth to be able to see. In other words, unless he was born again by being born of God and washed from his sin, he would be like the blind man walking around with

mud on his eyes. He had to be washed from the sin and healed in his heart to have the spiritual eyes of his heart opened to see and know God.

That brings us to the third question: What do you say about Jesus?

Now as we look at the dynamics of this account, we see that this is the question that ultimately everything led to. And that is the question that ultimately everything in our lives will lead to: what do you say about Jesus?

Now as we look at this account, what we see is that there is a conflict over this very question. The man has been healed. And the neighbors look at him, and he's so completely changed, they don't even recognize him. But then, they come to really believe that he was the beggar who was healed. Then they take him to the religious leaders, the Pharisees. And the Pharisees see this man, and they do not believe that he was healed at first. Finally, when they're convinced of that, then they attack Jesus. They attack Jesus for religious reasons.

And so we read this: *Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them.*¹⁷ *So they said to the blind man, "What do you say about him?"*

Now what's interesting, and sadly significant is that what we find here is a religious community. So many people can grow up in church. They can hear the word of God. They can sing songs about God. They can confess things such as the Apostles Creed. But they are, more or less, like the neighbors who really don't know what's happening. Or worse, they can be like the Pharisee who rejected Jesus because of their own self-righteousness. But it's not until our eyes are opened because we personally experience the grace of God that we come to see the truth of Who Jesus is.

You see, that's the very thing that happened in the life of John Newton. As I said, John Newton grew up in a Christian home. He had a devote mother. But somewhere along his life, he decided to give himself to a sinful life. And not only that, he became a slave trader and a captain of a slave ship. And certainly, in our day and age, we know how desperately wicked that is. But he was living his life apart from Christ, living in desperate sin, opposed to God until that moment, when he knew that ultimately his life depended on the grace of God, that he called out to God. And the Lord saved him. And God powerfully changed his life so that he then became the author of one of the greatest songs and hymns ever written, *Amazing Grace*.

You see, that's what God does in our lives. Whether we come to Christ as little children, or whether we're late in our life, whether we do not grow up in a church like I did, but we come to know Jesus because somebody shared it, or whether we grow up in church, we all must have that grace of God come into our lives, open our hearts to see Jesus. And when that takes place, we will be just like this man, that no matter what people say, no matter what opposition, religious authority, neighbors, it doesn't matter, we know who Jesus is, because we will say, "Once I was blind, but now I see."

Let our eyes be open to see that Jesus Christ is the Light of the world.