

MESSAGES from LIBERTY

“KNOWING JESUS IN *THE GOSPEL OF JOHN*”

4. The Man Born Blind

(John 9)

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Today, we continue our sermon series “Knowing Jesus through the *Gospel of John*”. And as we start Week Four it’s starting to feel to me like a “drive-by shooting” through the *Gospel of John*. Because we’re covering a lot of ground, really fast.

This week we’ll be reading chapters 7, 8, and 9—three chapters that are jam-packed with gold, passages like:

- “I am the light of the world, whoever believes in me will not walk in darkness but have the light of life”
- “Let the person without sin throw the first stone”
- “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink”
- “If you continue in my word, you will know the truth and the truth will make you free”.

This morning, I’m going to “drive by” chapters 7 and 8 so we can walk through chapter 9. Chapter 9 tells the story of Jesus healing a blind man—an incident that would have taken up maybe 7 verses in *Matthew*, *Mark* or *Luke*. But it takes up the entire ninth chapter of *John*. And that’s because, throughout his Gospel, *John* is determined that we are not blind ourselves, but that we see through to the deep truth of Jesus.

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Listen to God’s word from the ninth chapter of the *Gospel of John*:

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth.

Jesus is walking through Jerusalem with his disciples and he comes across a beggar, a beggar who Jesus learns has been blind his entire life. He can’t see, and he’s never been able to see. And because he can’t see, he’s doomed to live a marginal life—no job, no marriage, no independence, no future. He’s a person who needs help, a person who understands his need and doesn’t hide his need. If Jesus were to help this man, it’s going to make a real difference, a fundamental difference—faith for this man won’t be a lifestyle option, but it will form the very center of his life.

“Rabbi,” his disciples asked him, “why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or his parents’ sins?”

“It was not because of his sins or his parents’ sins,” Jesus answered. “This happened so the power of God could be seen in him. We must quickly carry out the tasks assigned us by the one who sent us. The night is coming, and then no one can work. But while I am here in the world, I am the light of the world.”

This man’s need is not an abstract need, something that can be theologized about: “Is his blindness punishment for sin, maybe his own sin, maybe the sins of his parents?” Jesus won’t

be dragged into this conversation. Jesus doesn't treat the blind man's need as a superficial need but as a real need, because Jesus didn't come to talk theology but to bring life.

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

In the Gospels, Jesus heals in all kinds of ways—sometimes he touches people, sometimes he prays, sometimes he simply says a word. But this is the weirdest style of healing we read about! Just imagine this from the blind man's point of view: He hears some hubbub as Jesus and his disciples come closer. He overhears the beginning of a theological discussion about sin and illness. And then someone spits—and not the polite kind of spitting, off to the side. It's a big spit, and right in front of him. And then hears someone doing something, doing what—making mud pies? And then, to his complete surprise, the blind man feels this gooey, slimy muck being smeared on his eyes. What's that about? He's had all kinds of pranks played on him—people stealing his food, people moving his stuff—but this is over the line.

So, when Jesus says, "Go, and wash in the pool of Siloam", the blind man goes, "No duh. What do you think I'm going to do, walk around with this stuff on my face all day?" And when the blind man gets to the pool, still muttering under his breath, he cleans the mud off his face—and he can see!

His neighbors and others who knew him as a blind beggar asked each other, "Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?" Some said he was, and others said, "No, he just looks like him!"

But the beggar kept saying, "Yes, I am the same one!"

They asked, "Who healed you? What happened?"

He told them, "The man they call Jesus made mud and spread it over my eyes and told me, 'Go to the pool of Siloam and wash yourself.' So I went and washed, and now I can see!"

"Where is he now?" they asked.

"I don't know," he replied.

This is not only a miracle; it's an unbelievable miracle. Nobody knows what to do with it. By the time the blind man comes back to his begging spot, Jesus has moved on, but his friends are still there, and they can't make heads or tails of it. "He looks like Joe, but it can't be Joe, because this guy can see, and Joe is blind." And Joe's saying, "No, it's me—I'm Joe!" And they say, "But it can't be. You can see. How'd this happen?" And Joe says, "I don't know! This man named Jesus came by, spit on the ground and made some mud and put it on my face and told me to wash it off and I did and now I can see." And his friends go, "Who is this guy?" And Joe says, "I have no clue."

Then they took the man who had been blind to the Pharisees, because it was on the Sabbath that Jesus had made the mud and healed him. The Pharisees asked the man all about it. So he told them, "He put the mud over my eyes, and when I washed it away, I could see!"

Some of the Pharisees said, "This man Jesus is not from God, for he is working on the Sabbath." Others said, "But how could an ordinary sinner do such miraculous signs?" So there was a deep division of opinion among them.

Then the Pharisees again questioned the man who had been blind and demanded, "What's your opinion about this man who healed you?"

The man replied, "I think he must be a prophet."

Everyone's still trying to get to the bottom of this. Since Joe's claiming he was miraculously healed, the people decide to take him to the religious authorities. They get there, and as Joe's telling his story, there's a problem. It's not a real problem, it's a superficial problem—it was Saturday, the Sabbath, the day of rest. For the Pharisees, the Sabbath meant not only that God has blessed His people with a day of rest, a day to not work but to enjoy the blessings of God and family and life, but it also meant that Jesus had broken the Sabbath, because he had worked on the Sabbath—he made mud pies, and he healed the blind man. Since he violated the Pharisee's interpretation of the Sabbath, Jesus was a sinner in their eyes, which raises the theological question—how can a sinner perform a miracle? And as this irrelevant theological debate is going on, someone turns to Joe and asks, “What do you think?” And Joe replies, “I don't know. I'm no theologian. But he gave me my sight. He must be a prophet.” *John* wants us to know that Joe is getting closer to seeing who Jesus is.

I'm going to skip over the next six verses in the interest of time and pick up the story at verse 24:

For a second time the Pharisees called in the man who had been blind and told him, “God should get the glory for this, because we know this man Jesus is a sinner.”

“I don't know whether he is a sinner,” the man replied. “But I know this: I was blind, and now I can see!”

“But what did he do?” they asked. “How did he heal you?”

“Look!” the man exclaimed. “I told you once. Didn't you listen? Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?”

Then they cursed him and said, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses! We know God spoke to Moses, but we don't even know where this man comes from.”

“Why, that's very strange!” the man replied. “He healed my eyes, and yet you don't know where he comes from? We know that God doesn't listen to sinners, but he is ready to hear those who worship him and do his will. Ever since the world began, no one has been able to open the eyes of someone born blind. If this man were not from God, he couldn't have done it.”

“You were born a total sinner!” they answered. “Are you trying to teach us?” And they threw him out of the synagogue.

Things go from bad to worse. The Pharisees keep pushing Joe, and Joe starts pushing back. Of course, his story is unassailable. If he had tried to argue theology with these guys, he would have gotten clobbered—they're the theologians. But that's not Joe's story. Joe's story is much simpler and to the point. He knows something that is true, irrefutably true: “One thing I know. I was blind but now I see.” How can anyone argue with that? Joe had a need, a real need, and Jesus took care of it—completely, entirely, forever. Joe reveals that he's seeing Jesus even more clearly—now he's saying that Jesus “comes from God”, that Jesus' actions reflect the love and grace and power of God Himself. And for saying that, he is excommunicated—thrown out of the synagogue, banned from worship, cut off from the community.

When Jesus heard what had happened, he found the man and asked, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

The man answered, “Who is he, sir? I want to believe in him.”

“You have seen him,” Jesus said, “and he is speaking to you!”

“Yes, Lord, I believe!” the man said. And he worshiped Jesus.

Jesus doesn't usually have to clean up after his miracles. But he does with Joe. Jesus had given him a priceless gift—he had given Joe his sight. But because the people were blind to what was going on, Joe was cut off. And so Jesus seeks out Joe. Jesus leads with a fairly loaded question: “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” And, as throughout the story, Joe shows no interest in talking about things that are abstract and hypothetical, because he's a practical guy. “Show me who he is, and I'll believe in him.” You see, along with his physical sight, Joe has also been given spiritual sight, a heart that is not reserved or cynical or skeptical, but a heart that, having experienced the power of God, is open to affirming God at work. Jesus says, “It's me.” And now, Joe sees completely. Jesus is no longer “a man” or “a prophet” or someone “come from God” —Jesus is Lord. And so Joe worships him.

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Why are you a Christian? What are your reasons for being here, that you have carved an hour out of your weekend schedule to worship the God who has made Himself know in Jesus Christ?

You know, there are a lot of mediocre reasons for being a Christian:

- “I was raised a Christian.”
- “My parents would be disappointed in me if I didn't go to church.”
- “I'm not sure what I believe, but I'm here because it's what my family does on Sunday mornings.”

But the blind man in John chapter 9 doesn't become a disciple of Jesus for mediocre reasons like these. No. For him, it's really simple. He has a need, a real need, and Jesus takes care of it. And so the blind man decides, “This is the person I'll live my life for.”

What is your need, your unmet need? All of us have needs. Not that we're needy people, desperate people, willing to cling to anything that looks like help. But if we look even a little bit beneath the surface of our pretty decent, fairly normal lives, we all have needs:

- Some of us need hope, because the short-term future doesn't look good at all.
- Some of us need forgiveness, because we've screwed up badly, and we've hurt some people badly, and the thought of living with ourselves carrying around this load of guilt is unbearable.
- Some of us need discipline, because we aren't in control of ourselves, because we've never really grown up, because we don't take life seriously or ourselves seriously, and we need an inner strength that we are sorely lacking.
- Some of us need to know there's someone in this world who knows us, really knows us, and yet still loves us.
- Some of us need to know that there's more to life than life, that death isn't the last word.

I am a Christian because I needed a purpose in life. When I was 17 years old, I was a poster child for suburban success, having won the college sweepstakes, looking forward to unlimited opportunities for an unlimited future. But I had a need—I couldn't figure out why it mattered. Why should I keep on achieving? What's the point, what's the purpose? I'm going to live for another 65 years and then I'm going to die. Does any of this matter? Why does any of this

matter? Because I didn't have a great interest in playing out the game of life if it didn't count for something.

That was my need—and Jesus met it. And he didn't meet it hypothetically or abstractly—he met it concretely. He showed himself to me, and immediately everything made sense, everything mattered, everything had a purpose, an eternal purpose, a purpose that still gets me out of bed every morning. It's not something that I can prove to you, but it's also something you can never talk me out of. Jesus met my need, and it's given me a faith that's unshakable.

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Here's what I'm saying. To be a Christian means to be someone who has a faith that is real, because Jesus Christ has met a need that is real, a need we can't meet on our own, limited to our own resources, from within ourselves. A Christian is the person whose need has been met by Jesus Christ as powerfully and decisively as He gave sight to the blind man.

What about you? Maybe it's time to get serious with yourself and serious with God and to ask God to take care of your need. Because if you do, you'll know, deep inside, what the good news is all about. AMEN

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