

The Nature of Spiritual Sight

Some of the most famous words in Christian hymnody are those lines, “I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind but now I see.” They're part of the most well known hymn in the world, “Amazing Grace”. Written by John Newton, the former slave trader, he wrote them in 1772, when the pastor of a church in Olney. In the last years of his life, Newton actually did lose his sight. But in a strange way, Newton could see more clearly than ever. In the years when he was a slave-trader, he could see with his eyes, but his heart was blind. But after he came to Christ, he experienced spiritual sight, even though his eyes were declining.

Spiritual sight: it may be one of the most important things in the world. It is the ability to understand reality. It is insight into what really is. We've been seeing how important the theme of light is in the Gospel of John. Darkness equal deception, hiding from truth, and sinning. Light equals truth, reality, and living in light of that. Jesus Himself is ultimate Light: He is Truth, What follows in John 9 is an actual healing of physical blindness. But the reactions of the Jewish leaders to this man born blind and unmistakably healed by Jesus on the Sabbath are a perfect illustration of spiritual blindness and spiritual sight. In the beautiful artistry of God, the blind man becomes a living illustration of what happens when you also receive your spiritual sight, while the sighted Pharisees are an illustration of how spiritual blindness manifests. When the blind see, they simply rejoice in what they can now see. But when the blind remain blind and claim sight they attack those who do see. As we watch the difference, we can see the difference between the grace of sight, and the curse of choosing darkness. As we move through this account, it happens in four stages: an inborn condition, an irrefutable healing, incorrigible rejection, and then the interpretation of the situation. John 9 is unusual, because most of the talking will be done not by Jesus, but by the man healed, and by his opponents.

I. The Inborn Condition

¹ Now as *Jesus* passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. ² And His disciples asked Him, saying, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³ Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. ⁴ I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; *the* night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

It was the Sabbath day. Probably the day after the events of chapter 8, or maybe a little while after them Jesus is still in Jerusalem, and they may be near the Temple, which is where people like a blind man would have positioned themselves to receive alms. The disciples of Jesus seemed to have a view of sickness similar to Job's friends: all calamity, difficulty, deformity must be a result of sin – the man's parents, and the man himself. The rabbis taught, “There is no death without sin, and there is no suffering without iniquity.” But it was difficult to explain someone born blind, even though some rabbis taught that if a pregnant woman worshipped in a pagan Temple, the child in her womb was implicated in the sin.

Now in the broadest sense, all deformity is the result of original sin, the curse in the world. But Jesus explains that it is not because of personal sin. Nor does Jesus mean that God made the child suffer blindness for years so that the cure might reveal His greatness. Instead, as F.F. Bruce says, “God overruled the disaster of the child's blindness so that, when the child grew to manhood, he might, by recovering his sight, see the glory of God in the face of Christ.”

Using the imagery of blindness and sight, Jesus compares His time on Earth to day time, when work is done. While He is here, He is the light of the world. And now He will go on to demonstrate that both physically and spiritually in this man's life. He is going to heal an inborn condition with an

irrefutable healing.

II. The Irrefutable Healing

⁶ When He had said these things, He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva; and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. ⁷ And He said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is translated, Sent). So he went and washed, and came back seeing.

On other occasions the Lord simply touched the eyes of the blind. We do not know the significance of making mud and anointing the man's eyes and sending him to the Pool of Siloam. Perhaps it was to remind the man that God made us from dust and can heal us with the same. Perhaps it had the practical result of being somewhat irritating, and urging the man to follow through with the command to go to the pool of Siloam. The meaning of Siloam reminds us of Jesus's mission as the Sent-One. The Bible doesn't tell us, but we can imagine those moments when that man washed his eyes and suddenly, light came to him. We imagine him getting up and seeing water for the first time, faces, merchants. A whole new world breaks in upon him everywhere he goes, and people who know him see this smiling man no longer walking around with a stick, or with help.

Here is a simple and beautiful illustration of salvation. To be washed and to come back seeing. To become a Christian is to be washed from the dirt of sin and rebellion against God, and then to come back seeing: looking at life through new lenses, realising and understanding what you couldn't see before. "I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see".

⁸ Therefore the neighbors and those who previously had seen that he was blind said, "Is not this he who sat and begged?" ⁹ Some said, "This is he." Others said, "He is like him." He said, "I am he." ¹⁰ Therefore they said to him, "How were your eyes opened?" ¹¹ He answered and said, "A Man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to the pool of Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed, and I received sight." ¹² Then they said to him, "Where is He?" He said, "I do not know."

The reaction by neighbours is near disbelief. The Old Testament has no healings of blind men. They have never heard of a man born blind recovering his sight, so some assume it cannot be the blind man they knew, it must just be a lookalike. But he confirms their wondering questions. "It really is me!" And when they ask how he can now see, all he can do is relate the story of what was done to him by a man called Jesus.

When someone is born again, saved, the difference between the old life and the new can be so radical that friends and neighbours say, "Is this the same person?" Some say, "No, it can't be. The person we knew was a cheat, a gossip, a slanderer, a sluggard, an adulterer, a brawler. This person is completely unlike that one. This person is kind, gentle, self-controlled, content, at peace." And the Christian says, "No, it really is me." "What happened to you?"

The testimony which every Christian, at root gives is this: "A person called Jesus found me, forgave Me, and opened my eyes." It is irrefutable. You cannot argue with it. The change has happened.

Well, everyone knows this is a miraculous thing, so they decide to bring the man to the religious authorities for their opinion. But what we find here is ironically, blindness. Incurable rejection. Incurable means someone who cannot be persuaded, who cannot change their ways or their opinion.

III. The Incurable Rejection

¹³ They brought him who formerly was blind to the Pharisees. ¹⁴ Now it was a Sabbath when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ Then the Pharisees also asked him again how he had received his sight. He

said to them, "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see." ¹⁶ Therefore some of the Pharisees said, "This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath." Others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them.

Now the Pharisees inspect the man, and ask for the story. They receive the same account. But the problem is, Jesus has once again chosen to do this miracle not a day before and not a day after the Sabbath, but on the Sabbath. This broke the Sabbath on two accounts: making mud was considered the same as kneading dough, so it was breaking the Sabbath. Second, as Edersheim tells us "It was, indeed, declared lawful to apply, for example, wine to the outside of the eyelid... but it was sinful to apply it to the inside of the eye. And as regards saliva, its application to the eye is expressly forbidden, on the ground that it was evidently intended as a remedy." He is deliberately forced the issue of His authority, of His status.

And this forces this Pharisees onto the horns of a dilemma. They must choose between two logical syllogisms. One says: Only someone from God could heal the blind. Jesus has healed the blind, Jesus must be from God. The other says, People who break the Sabbath and not from God. Jesus has broken the Sabbath. Jesus is not from God. One group chooses this latter option. These are the men who would post a notice: "Attention all miracle-workers: All supernatural acts that transcend the laws of human life are to be performed between sunset Saturday night and the following Friday sunset. Performing acts of God between Friday night and Saturday is strictly forbidden." But that is the logic. Forget that a man who can do this is likely the same one who gave the Law to Israel in the first place. No, apparently even God must submit to the traditions of the rabbis.

The other group is more moderate. They're asking the obvious question. Yes, He did it on the Sabbath, but what kind of lawbreaker has this kind of power?

You'll find the same kind of reaction when you become a Christian. No one can deny the change in you, but the people who see it have to explain it. If they accept your explanation: that God has changed you and come into your life, then they must believe Jesus Christ is real. But if they reject Jesus, they must try to explain it away: you found a religious crutch, you had a mid-life crisis, you've been brainwashed, you're trying to please people at home.

Well, at this point, the Pharisees have the answer in plain sight: Jesus of Nazareth healed this man born blind. But that is a conclusion they do not want. They are fleeing from the truth. So they begin an interrogation, beginning with the man, moving to his parents, and then returning to the man.

¹⁷ They said to the blind man again, "What do you say about Him because He opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet."

The first stop is to ask, "So what is your opinion of Jesus, because He did this for you?" Perhaps they were hoping the man would say that Jesus was a magician, an occultist. But he gives an answer they don't like - "He is a prophet". In Jewish life, that meant, a man sent from God, a man endued with powers by God, like Moses or Elijah.

That's not what they want to hear. Maybe there is some other explanation. Maybe the man was never blind. Maybe he was a fake a phoney, a con-artist who pretended blindness. So it is time for the Scotland Yard of Jerusalem to do some sleuthing and do a background check.

¹⁸ But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind and received his sight, until they called the parents of him who had received his sight. ¹⁹ And they asked them, saying, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" ²⁰ His parents answered them and said, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹ but by what means he now sees we do not know, or who opened his eyes we do not know. He is of age; ask him. He will speak for himself." ²² His parents said these *things* because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed *that* He was Christ,

he would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

The parents confirm the man's identity, "Yes, it's our son", and they confirm his former condition. But as to this change in his life, they can sense this is a problem. They sense the Pharisees are not happy that their son has been miraculously healed from lifelong blindness. This is a bad thing, you see, no cause for rejoicing. So sensing the tension in the air, they bat the ball back over the net to their son. Whatever he did, or was done to him to get this miraculous cure, we had no part of it, we did not endorse it, or pay for it, and we hereby indemnify ourselves of any good thing that has happened to our son. Please refer all further questions to that adult legal entity, otherwise known as our son.

It's funny how often when people come to Christ, other people start asking the family questions. I remember a relative asked my parents about me. "When did this religious thing begin with David? How did he catch this virus?" And family usually only has some kind of "the church down the road brainwashed him" answer.

Okay, this interrogation is not going well. The man healed thinks Jesus is a prophet. His parents verify he is who he says he is. His parents verify that he was born blind. And unfortunately, it is obvious that he can now see. Well, the last remaining option is that this man is withholding some vital information, refusing to disclose something that will reveal that Jesus is a sinner.

²⁴ So they again called the man who was blind, and said to him, "Give God the glory! We know that this Man is a sinner." ²⁵ He answered and said, "Whether He is a sinner *or not* I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see."

Now they have reached the point of telling the man what he must decide about Jesus. He must confess that he was healed by some wickedness, some sinful deception in Jesus. Give God the glory may mean – be honest because God is watching you. Maybe they mean – give God the glory for healing you separately and apart from Jesus! Incurable rejection. The man's clear-eyed honesty is a bright light amidst their darkness. "I cannot make a judgement on Jesus. I can only tell you what has happened to me. I was blind, now I see."

When people assail your faith, when they tell you that God cannot exist, that the Bible cannot be God's Word, that Jesus did not rise from the dead, there is one irrefutable answer: "As to all your objections, I cannot answer them. One thing I know, I once was blind, now I see." The simple experience and testimony of opened eyes cannot be gainsaid, it cannot be undone, it cannot be taken away. Once you see, you cannot unsee, not matter how many people tell you you must unsee. Picture saying to this blind man, "You are not really seeing us here."

Well, there is nothing like the facts of reality to enrage people who hate the truth. So now they are just about breathing in his face with clenched fists.

²⁶ Then they said to him again, "What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?" ²⁷ He answered them, "I told you already, and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear *it* again? Do you also want to become His disciples?"

This is the fourth time in this passage that they are asking, "How did you get healed?" When they simply cannot accept what has happened to the man, they demand he re-tell the story differently. They want a new version of what happened to him that doesn't have Jesus healing him with the power of God. This is incurable rejection.

This is when people get angry with you about your conversion story. “What really happened to you? Was it money? Some financial crisis? Drugs? Did you get into some kind of trouble in business and used 'religious conversion' to explain it? Tell us the real story!”

His sarcastic answer shows that all his years of blindness had not dulled his wittiness or sharpness. He knows these Pharisees are liars in search of an alternative to the truth. Nothing he says will satisfy them short of lying and telling a story that suits their narrative. “Why must I re-tell the story of what Jesus did to me? Do you love stories about Jesus, too? Are you enlisting in the school of Jesus?” He is evidently not afraid of what will happen when you get sassy with the top rabbis of Jerusalem.

²⁸ Then they reviled him and said, “You are His disciple, but we are Moses’ disciples. ²⁹ We know that God spoke to Moses; *as for this fellow*, we do not know where He is from.”

So they begin the insulting process. “Disciple? It's obvious who is Jesus' disciple. It's you! You're in some kind of collusion with Jesus. We are Moses' disciples, Moses whom we have verified and can tell he was from God. But Jesus is a no-name brand that did not come through any of our schools.”

Now the man is apparently willing to take the gloves off and give these Pharisees a right hook to the jaw.

³⁰ The man answered and said to them, “Why, this is a marvelous thing, that you do not know where He is from; yet He has opened my eyes! ³¹ Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him. ³² Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. ³³ If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing.”

The man actually presents a series of statements that logically connect. God does not do mighty works through sinners, those opposed to Him. But God does work through His people, people who worship and obey Him. A work like healing a man born blind is a staggering miracle, impossible for someone who was a rebel. The conclusion, Jesus could not have done this if He were not godly, enabled by God. But He did do this. So it doesn't matter if He didn't come through your rabbinic schools. He still healed me! The implication is: the Pharisees can't tell who is from God, or possibly even, they are not from God.

³⁴ They answered and said to him, “You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?” And they cast him out.

Their answer is to simply resort to slander and insult. They go back to the old Jewish misunderstanding of sickness we saw at the beginning. For him to be born blind it had to be his parents' sin or his sin. And of course, they're now admitting that they do think he was born blind, in which case they are admitting that a miracle has taken place!

So now they can ignore what he says, and what has happened to him, because of who he is. He is a sinner, he's nothing, it doesn't matter what he says. And he has the audacity to use theological logic on us?! They cast him out. That doesn't mean they hustled him out the door. It means they formally excommunicated him from the synagogue.

This was a big deal in Judaism. The synagogue was where you were registered in the genealogies, where your children were named, where you went for instruction and general community. To be cast out, is the equivalent of what Jesus means when teaching on church discipline: when the church excommunicates someone, he comes like a heathen, a Gentile, and a tax-collector to you. People would keep at a distance of two metres. from him. He would not be admitted into an assembly of

ten men, neither to public prayer, He was not allowed to study with others, no conversation was to be held with him, he was not even to be shown the road. He might, indeed, buy the necessaries of life, but it was forbidden to eat or drink with such an one.

Just a few hours into his new sighted life, and he has lost all standing within Jewish society. But there is a Good Shepherd looking for the sheep kicked out of the fold of the synagogue, looking for the flock of God's people.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, "Do you believe in the Son of God?" ³⁶ He answered and said, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" ³⁷ And Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you." ³⁸ Then he said, "Lord, I believe!" And he worshiped Him.

Word spread that the miracle man has been expelled from the synagogue. Jesus find the man. Of course, when the man sees Jesus, he does not recognise Him, because he has never seen Him before. So Jesus asks Him the great question: do you believe in the Son of God? That is, are you trusting in the Son of God? Yes, you've been expelled from the synagogue, but have you joined the Son of God's people? Have you signed up with Him, to follow Him, be loyal to Him?

The man's response is amazing. He doesn't say, "So who is this supposed Son of God, and what are His credentials anyway?" He says, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him? I want to follow Him, just point me in His direction! I want to enlist, where is the sign-up sheet?" This is a heart being drawn and renewed.

The blind man only heard the name of Jesus and heard His voice, but He still doesn't know what Jesus looks like, because His sight only came back when he washed in the Pool of Siloam, some distance from where Jesus healed him. Jesus did not hang around to receive the acclaim or follow the man. So the blind man would not be able to identify Jesus by sight if he tried.

Jesus now warmly reminds the man of the miracle. You have already seen Him, with your new-found sight, and He is the one talking to you now. Then the man now connects the voice he'd heard, with the face he now sees. His simple response is what the whole book of John is after: "Lord, I believe". And he worshipped Jesus. This is the Son of God who has come into the world, who kindly healed his physical blindness, but more importantly, has claimed him as one of His own, as His disciples, as a child of God. Worship, honour, thanksgiving, joy is how you respond to grace.

Now for the first time in this chapter, Jesus does the teaching. He is going to explain what this whole situation illustrates about light and darkness, seeing and blindness.

IV. The Interpreted Situation

³⁹ And Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind." ⁴⁰ Then *some* of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, "Are we blind also?" ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, 'We see.' Therefore your sin remains. (John 9:1–41)

Jesus says, I came to divide the world up, to distinguish people into two groups. Those who recognise their blindness, and come for sight; and those who insist they do see, and go deeper into their darkness. The first group is any person who realises he is a sinner, admits his ignorance, lostness, blindness, and comes to God in Christ for forgiveness and new life and light. The second group is any person who is committed to self-righteousness, committed to and proud of his own wisdom, certain that his take on the world is absolutely correct, and he has no need of God, the

Bible or anything like that. His stubbornness in being committed to what he thinks he sees will doom him to the judgement of being given over to deeper blindness.

The Pharisees who hear these words know that it refers to them. The man they have just cast out has come to follow Jesus. He is one who both physically and spiritually was blind but now he sees. So what does that mean about them? They are the ones who claim they see, but are blind. So they ask in a hostile fashion, "Are we blind also?" And Jesus says, "if you were actually innocent of rejection, you would not be guilty. If you didn't know, if you were just naïve, or ignorant, you'd have less guilt. Ignorant blindness is one thing. But you claim knowledge, you claim to be able to see, while refusing the light. So you are guilty. You are guilty of the blindness of shutting your own eyes to the truth."

You and I have an inborn condition of spiritual blindness. It takes a mighty work of grace to bring about that irrefutable opening of our eyes. But alongside that, we often find that incorrigible, unteachable rejection of light. Pray that not be you, arguing against the obvious work of God. But understand it will come from others when it is you who has come to saving faith. And take comfort: this is what Jesus said He would do as the light of the world: divide it up into those who love darkness and claim to see in it, and those who admit their blindness and come to the light of Jesus.