

I ONCE WAS BLIND
John 9:1-12

1 March 2015

[Note: Preaching is a live event where God meets with His people, and that cannot be reproduced or duplicated. It is unique every time, and indispensable in the life of the Christian and the church. This is not a complete transcript; it is typically about 80% of the actual sermon. Some common abbreviations in these notes are: "NB" = *nota bene*, "note well" / "+" = an illustration / "→" = an application / "BTW" = By the way / "Cf." = cross-reference / "i.e." = In other words / "b/c" = because / "E.G." = for example.]

Turn to John 9...

Listen to this poem written by an 8-year old blind girl in the year 1831:

*Oh, what a happy soul am I!
Although I cannot see,
I am resolved that in this world
Contented I will be.*

*How many blessings I enjoy
That other people don't;
To weep and sigh because I'm blind,
I cannot, and I won't.*

Know which blind girl wrote that? – She went on to become the author of over 8,000 Christian hymns, many of which are still sung today: Fanny Crosby.

But she was not born blind. – No, Fanny's eyes were perfectly normal. – But at 6 wks of age poor medical treatment accidentally blinded her. – One doctor's mistake cost her a lifetime of seeing. How bitter she could've become.

Someone once said to Mrs. Crosby, "I think it is a great pity that [the Lord], when He showered so many gifts upon you, did not give you sight." –

But Fanny replied, "Do you know that if at birth I had been able to make one [request of] my Creator, it would've been that I should be *born* blind?"

"*Why?*", asked the astonished person. – "Because," said Fanny Crosby, "when I get to heaven, the first face that shall ever gladden my sight...will be that of my Savior."

HOW could a suffering person have that kind of outlook? – How could an afflicted person have that kind of attitude?...

Here's how: ONLY by having something *more valuable* than physical sight: by having spiritual sight, spiritual understanding through the eyes of faith. –

When your soul can see, you can live without eyes that see.

How often in the Bible, and in our own lives, does God use physical illnesses, like blindness, to teach us profound spiritual lessons?

See, this famous story here in Jn. 9 will not move us & affect us as it should unless we face up to this awful disease of the soul, called spiritual blindness. – Until you see how

terrible & deadly it is to have a blind soul, this healing of a blind man won't mean much to you.

→Beloved, if physical blindness is not cured, its consequences can last as long as your earthy life, perhaps 80-90 yrs max, but no longer than that. – Physical blindness cannot follow you to the grave.

But spiritual blindness can. – Left untreated, spiritual blindness stays with you in the life to come, its consequences are eternal....

Jesus describes Hell as “outer darkness”, a place of everlasting blindness and blackest night, forever and ever and ever.

Stand, Read & Pray: often pray either 1:14,16, or 20:31...

****FOUR AREAS in your life that Christ, the Eye-Opener, the Sight-Giver, wants to transform:***

1. vv. 1-3, YOUR TRIALS

We don't know if this was immediately after chp 8, or with some time lapse in between...

v. 1 – Never once had he seen his mother's face, a blue sky, or a green field. – Never once had he glimpsed a setting sun, a blossoming flower, or a puppy's wagging tail. – Darkness was all he had ever known.

He couldn't even conceive of colours – blue, green, red, orange – these were foreign categories to him. – A million glories of nature were all hidden from him.

~ Here's how Helen Keller described her blindness as a little girl: “Gradually I got used to the silence and darkness that surrounded me and forgot that it had ever been different....”

+ Imagine the day this Jewish boy in Jn. 9 was born – and the days that followed – at what point did his parents realise he would never see?...at what point did he realise he would never see?...

He never saw his mother cry, but I'll bet he heard it? – And did he ever reach up to stroke her cheek and feel tears streaming down?...

To make matters worse, once this blind boy grew up, look at the only career available to him: From v. 8, we learn that this blind was now a beggar. –

Like another Bartimaeus (Mk. 10), left to sit by the roadside and call out, ‘Alms, alms, alms for the poor. Have mercy, show pity for a helpless blind man! Please....’

From vv. 18ff, we learn that his parents were still in town. – But they had given up, or done all they could – and now their son was the local beggar. – Imagine the shame, the disgrace, the agony....

→Does the Bible have anything to say to those with disabilities, and to parents of disabled children? – Can Christians offer any hope to parents whose world has just come crashing

down after finding out their child is handicapped? – Is there any lasting comfort for you if have a permanent disability?

Praise God, the Bible is replete with references to suffering and sorrow. – It's part of what makes the Bible so believable, because it so brutally honest about the brokenness of life. –

Scripture repeatedly sheds light on the deepest agonies of life. Just as we're about to see here....

NB, v. 5, if Jesus is "the Light of the world", then He also understands darkness better than anyone. – Christ's Light can give meaning to what seems like the most meaningless pain & prolonged suffering.

God has NOT left us alone, left us just to create our own meaning or find our own answers in life. – Christ's light illumines the darkest valleys you could ever walk through.

→NB, this story doesn't start with the disciples' question, v. 2, or them seeing the blind man. – It starts with Jesus seeing, Jesus' noticing, Jesus' caring.

Jesus didn't just pass by this disabled man like the priest or the Levite on the Jericho Road, passing over to the other side to avoid the afflicted. –

That's our natural reflex – to avoid the pain of others, to stay in our comfort zone.

But we are not natural people. – We are followers of Jesus. – We have His Spirit in our hearts. – We see with new eyes, we feel with a new heart that we didn't have before.

v. 2 – Here is a perfect example of the logical fallacy known as the 'Fallacy of the Excluded Middle', i.e., the false dilemma fallacy that excludes any viable 3rd option.

See, these disciples, demonstrate a universal tendency – that gut instinct we have to look at sufferers and think, 'well, you get what you deserve in life'.

Now, it is true that sin and suffering are linked. – Before the Fall of man into sin, there was no suffering. – The Bible is clear that Adam's sin plunged all humanity into sickness & death.

HOWEVER, *that does not mean that all suffering is the cause of your individual, personal sin.* – That is overly simplistic, and simply unbiblical.

+ God went out of His way, through perhaps the first & oldest book of the Bible, the Book of Job, to prove how wrong that kind of thinking is. –

Job's friends were convinced that Job must be the worst sinner around because he faced the worst suffering. – But Job's story proves otherwise.

YES, sin is *generally* the cause of all sickness & suffering in the world. – And YES, some illnesses are the direct result of your sin & disobedience and the Lord's discipline & chastening.

HOWEVER, to say that every malady or misery can be traced back to a *specific*, personal sin as the cause?? – That ‘goes beyond what is written’ in Scripture.

No wonder Job said to his counsellors, “miserable comforters are you all”!

But Jesus’ disciples were eager to join the ranks of miserable comforters:

‘What could be more logical, they thought: (a) tragedy of a man born blind; (b) find the moral cause – somebody must’ve sinned to deserve such misery;

(c) either he sinned very early on, maybe in the womb?!; (d) OR, his parents really messed up and caused all this, right?...

~ African traditional religion says the same essentially: ‘If God is pleased with you, you’ll be healthy & wealthy. If you are not, you need to appease God and the spirits.’

~ Hinduism would add this question (to v. 2), ‘Did he sin in a previous life?’ (giving him bad karma) – It’s essentially that same, fault-finding mindset.

v. 3 – Jesus corrects this flawed thinking with one word: “Neither”. He rejects both of their alternatives and refuses to be painted into an ‘either-or’ corner. –

Instead, Jesus points to a much bigger picture and wider horizon than the disciple’s narrow, tit-for-tat worldview.

NB, the disciples want to look backward. – Jesus wants to look forward. –

The disciples want to know the cause; Jesus points to the purpose of this trial. –

They’re thinking diagnosis, Jesus is thinking “display”. –

They want to blame someone for this tragedy. – But God wants to *display Someone*, Christ, and showcase His glory through suffering.

The disciples want to go down the road of speculation. – But Jesus turns them down the road of compassion, and anticipation – expecting God to do what only God can do, a miracle on behalf of this desperate man.

→Beloved, let’s be honest: How often is our thinking just as convoluted as Jesus’ disciples?! – thinking we’ve boxed God into a corner, or that our circumstances have stumped God into a huge dilemma – all the while, He has grand & glorious purposes are unfolding through our trial, which we have no idea of!

*God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.*

*Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs
And works His sovereign will.*

*God's purposes will ripen fast
Unfolding every hour
The bud may have a bitter taste
But sweet will be the flower*

*Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter
And He will make it plain.*

*...Behind a frowning Providence
He hides a smiling face.*

+ Imagine all those years – that poor blind man wondering,

‘Why me, why me? Everyone else can see fine. They all talk about all the great things they can see. I can’t even imagine what seeing would be like. I never saw one day in my life. Why me?!...’

→Do not believe the LIE of today’s faith healers & health-and-wealth preachers. – I read about a man named Harvey, with cerebral palsy (like Debbie in Pkwane, like Justin Peters) tossed from one false prophet to another!...

They take the most sick & ailing folks and tell them: (a) you don’t have enough faith; (b) if that doesn’t work, they say there must be some secret sin in your life; (c) if that doesn’t work, then there must be a demon to exorcise.

I.e., they steal from you every ounce of your ‘joy of salvation’, your hope in God, your spiritual growth and desire for Christlikeness....

→Christian, allow Christ to lift your eyes also – *from the horizontal to the vertical view* of your trials:

FROM asking, ‘Who’s fault is this suffering? Who can I blame? Why me?, etc.’,

TO asking, ‘What is God up to in this trial? Lord, what do you want to teach me?’, etc.

→We all have a ‘theology of suffering’, a grid by which we interpret all hardship & tragedy. – But Jesus’ here takes our view of suffering and turns it upside-down!...

~ Key truth here, as Piper puts it: *...Suffering can only have ultimate meaning in relation to God.*

Jesus says that the purpose of the blindness is to put the work of God on display. This means that for our suffering to have ultimate meaning, God must be supremely valuable to us.

More valuable than health and life. Many things in the Bible make no sense until God becomes your supreme value.

For Jesus, blindness from birth is sufficiently explained by saying: God intends to display some of his glory through this blindness. In this case, it happens to be healing—the glory of God’s power to heal. But there is nothing that says it has to be healing.

When Paul cried out three times for his thorn in the flesh to be healed, Jesus said, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). I will put my power on display, not by healing you, but by sustaining you.

In other words, healing displays the works of God in John 9, and sustaining grace displays the works of God in 2 Corinthians 12. What is common in the two cases is the supreme value of the glory of God. The blindness is for the glory of God. The thorn in the flesh is for the glory of God. The healing is for his glory, and the non-healing is for his glory.

Suffering can only have ultimate meaning in relation to God.

→This is but one of many PURPOSES of God in trials. – Others: Jam. 1:2-4 & Rom. 5:3ff; Job 23:12; 1 Pet. 1:5ff; Ps. 119:71, etc.!...

NOT a single trial for the believer is ever without purpose & meaning – all is filtered through the hands of our loving heavenly Father....

~ Ligon Duncan, “The truths that comfort most in the trial are the ones learned *before* the trial.”

2. vv. 4-5, YOUR TIME

vv. 4-5 – I.e., ‘Gentlemen, remember why I have come – not just to pontificate and speculate with empty words, but to do the works of My Father – to advance His kingdom, spread His gospel, extend His salvation!’

‘You see in this blind man merely a theological discussion; I see a real person and a ministry opportunity.’

Recall Jesus’ great claim in Jn. 8:12...

He now takes that general, timeless truth and applies it specifically to His incarnation (v. 4a, “sent”). – Jesus’ public ministry while on earth was very brief, a mere 3 yrs.

And by this point, there’s only a few months left before they crucify Him, before they snuff out the Light of the world, temporarily at least.

v. 5, where Christ was present, it was always day time. – What brighter light could you ask for than the very person of Christ in your midst – teaching, modelling, touching & healing.

The light of His truth dispelled the darkness of lies. – The light of His purity exposed sin. – The light of His wisdom confronted folly. The light of His salvation rescued the perishing.

This was why He came, this was who He was – the world’s only Light, mankind’s only Saviour!

~ As one writer puts it, soon “Jesus will turn from a ministry of healing to a ministry of dying. He will turn from the day-work of relieving suffering, and do the night-work of suffering Himself. He will finally submit totally to the plan of his Father that the Son be swallowed up by the sin and suffering of the world.”

→v. 4, Jesus applies this principle beyond just Himself and His brief earthly ministry. – He extends it to His disciples, and by implication then, to us.

NB, “WE” – What a privilege! – 1 Cor. 3 & 2 Cor. 6, ‘we are co-workers together with HIM!’...

Aren’t you thrilled just to be in the ‘we’?!

~ ‘Tis only one life, will soon be past. Only what’s done for Christ will last.’ – Such a brief window!

Jm. 4, our life is but vapour, here today, gone tomorrow. – How short this “day”, how long that “night”!!

Repeat: v. 4...

Ps. 90, “Teach us to number our days, that we might present to You a heart of wisdom.”

Eph. 5, “Redeem the time/buy-it-back, for the days are evil”.

~ (Alcorn) ‘In serving Christ, we’ll have all eternity to enjoy our rewards, but only these few hours in which to win them, this one short life!’

Repeat: v. 4...

→I.e., now is time to work. – The older I get, the more I want to get done for the Lord, not the less. – As long as God gives me strength, I cannot slow down, cut back, coast & cruise.... Life is too short for that!

John 4:35...! – Nothing is more satisfying!... 1 Cor. 15:58!...

NOW, Jesus’ illustrates & powerfully proves His point before their very eyes.

With v. 5 ringing in this blind man’s ears, watch what happens next:

3. vv. 6-7, YOUR EYES

v. 6 – After hearing Jesus say what He just said, the blind man now feels this upon his face...

WHY this whole spit & mud method here? – Just for dramatic effect & drumroll for Christ's glory? – Perhaps.

NB, Jesus didn't need this; we know He could heal with a word. – Not like there was some special chemical in the Palestinian clay of the day!

I see THREE possible reasons for the mud-mask here:

- (a) vv 14-15, the mud-making is explicitly connected with the Sabbath and the Pharisees. – Kneading of 'dough' forbidden in their manmade Sabbath laws, same word for 'mud/clay' here.

Jesus was deliberately inviting another confrontation, showing Himself as Lord of the Sabbath. – Showing Himself as goal & fulfilment of all the Sabbath truly stood for – rest & healing for broken & weary humans.

- (b) May also be an echo here of God's first creation of man in Gen. 2, bending down very personally and hand-making man from the dust of the ground, then breathing into Adam the breathe of life?? ('He who made man out of earth also cured him with earth.')

...Christ the Creator was using the clay to fashion a new pair of eyes??...

- (c) Testing the blind man for true faith, looking for true obedience (not like the fickle crowds in Jn 6 & Jn. 8, unsaved believers). – Like Elisha with Naaman, going down to the Jordan River to wash 7x (2 Kgs 5)

v. 7a – NB, he couldn't see, but he could hear. – It's been said, 'The last hope for a blind, doomed & damned sinner is when God gives him ears!'

+ Siloam, a very special place in Jerusalem:

Outside the wall, there was a place called the Spring of Gihon, a major water supply for the city.

But also then a major target for enemy siege – like in Hezekiah's day when he feared the Assyrians would surround the city and cut off the water supply. –

So he had a tunnel built from the spring up, in under the city wall, into Jerusalem so they would have a water supply, and the water was kept in the pool of Siloam.

It meant, "Sent", because the water was sent from the spring, Gihon, into the city. –

NB, Siloam was also the water supply where they went at the Feast of Tabernacles to gather the water for the great festival when they poured out the water remembering God's provision of water in the wilderness, and Jesus said He was the water, the living water.

So Siloam = God's provision, God's supply, God's salvation!

Through Christ, His “Sent” One! – v. 4a and often in John....

v. 7b – The biblical writers are often masters of the understatement!

+ Picture this guy making his way down to Siloam? – Feeling foolish? – Heart racing with anticipation? – Or scepticism? – Or mixture of both? (‘Never tried this before?’)...

...THEN, first thing he saw might’ve been his own reflection?!...

For the first time in his life, his eyes are working! – All the things he’d only heard others describe, he now sees for himself!

The God who first said “Let there be light!”, now says, “Let there be sight!” – And this man’s curse from birth is reversed!

...As he gained confidence, he must’ve run faster & faster back home, and screamed louder & louder, ‘I can see! I can see! I once was blind, but now I see!’

‘Dad, Mom, look at me now!’...

→Every miracle Jesus did is a sign of His deity, that Jesus is God & Messiah! – And every miracle is a pointer – looking back & looking fwd – back to Eden & a day when there was no sickness & no suffering, no brokenness & no pain. –

And pointing fwd to the day when Christ returns to this earth to make “all things new”, to lift the curse forever, to wipe every tear from our eyes, to usher in His new heavens & new earth, and to give us new bodies, unbroken and unfailing, never to die again, like His own risen & glorious body!

What a hope! – Contra. the hospitals & nursing homes of this world, so full of brokenness & decay....

→Most of all here, as we’ll see next time: a picture of salvation! – As one writer describes:

“Sovereign grace confronts a blind and helpless, hopeless begging sinner. He can’t see, can’t see God, can’t see Christ. But sovereign grace comes to him, places His glorious, merciful hand on his sightless soul, asks only a response of simple faith, prompts that response.”

“He finds his way to the cleansing waters, which is an emblem of Messianic salvation in Isaiah, and he comes back, and he can see, spiritually.” (MacArthur) – an incredibly beautiful picture!...

*~ Holy Spirit, Truth Divine,
Dawn upon this soul of mine,
Word of God, inward Light,
Wake my spirit, clear my sight!*

*~ Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind;
Sight, riches, healing of the mind;
Yea, all I need, in Thee to find,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!*

→NB, v 7, likewise the gospel is very simple and very specific – don't complicate it or add to it, just do it! – And God's gospel command is also very personal, no one else can do it for you. – And it is immediate, to be done without delay!...

4. vv. 8-12, YOUR STORY

→NB, all could see that he was a changed man! – the fruit was obvious, the evidence was irrefutable!...

vv. 8-9 – Can't you just imagine the scene, the Jerusalem buzz, the whole city in an uproar. – This man has new eyes; but his neighbours can't believe their eyes!

Yet the healed man just kept silencing the sceptics by this one-liner: "I am he".

vv. 10-11 – Does this really answer the question? – It only describes his experience of what happened. –

But he is unable to answer 'how' it happened. – It was a miracle, it was Jesus, He did the inexplicable, the supernatural!...

→Christian, this is your story: I don't know exactly how. – All I know is, 'I once was blind, but now I see!' – Meeting 'this man Jesus' changed everything! – Ever since the day HE pursued me, nothing has been the same....

v.12 – Wait, stop & think about that question: HOW was this man supposed to know what Jesus looked like?! – He'd never seen Jesus, He only heard His word, never seen His face.

→Have your spiritual eyes been opened?! ...Can you join with John in Jn. 1:14?!...

CONCL. – Repeat 4 scenes...

*Hear Him, ye deaf; his praise, ye dumb
Your loosened tongues employ;
Ye blind behold your Saviour come
And leap ye lame for joy!*

*...My gracious Master and my God
Assist me to proclaim.
To spread through all the earth abroad
The honours of Thy name.*

PRAY