

Spiritual Blindness

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 December 2017

Preacher: Nick Louw

[0 : 00] Well, last week we left off with Jesus declaring this great statement about himself, that he is the light of the world, in chapter 8.

And we looked at what that means, and we saw that he was referring back, if you were here last week, to the Old Testament, when God led his people through the wilderness to the promised land, using this great pillar of light, pillar of fire.

It was an incredible, miraculous event, and Jesus is now linking that to his own ministry, and saying how in the same way, Jesus came to earth to lead people through the wilderness of this life, into a whole new life, because Jesus is the light that shows people the way to God and the way to eternity.

Now that is, last week's sermon summed up. Now that doesn't, I'm not encouraging you to miss Sundays, because you think you're going to get a summary each week of what happened before. But these chapters are so, and the way John writes his gospel is so linked, that we can only really understand what's going on in John chapter 9, if we understand what happened already in John chapter 8.

And Jesus saying this great thing, that he is the light of the world, exposing this great truth to all of us. He is our light, to guide us to God. But this week, what I want to do is consider why, if this is true, if Jesus is the light of the world, like he claims to be, then why are so many people still not seeing that light, and so not following that light?

[1 : 34] I mean, haven't you asked yourself that? Haven't you wondered, with all that Jesus has to offer, with all that he's said, all the evidence that he's given, why do people still refuse to follow him?

Many, many people in this world, friends and family that you might know, were colleagues. They just don't see it. They refuse to follow Jesus. Well, it's in John chapter 9 that we find out why that is. Why people don't follow the light. And we see it's not for lack of evidence. I mean, Jesus has already given more than enough evidence in chapters past.

And it's not that people don't want the life that Jesus offers. I mean, who wouldn't? Who wouldn't want the sure hope of eternal life, relationship with the creator of all things, all wonderful good things that we enjoy on earth, to have an intimate relationship with the source of all that?

Who wouldn't want that forever, for eternity, living in a new creation, a perfect world, with no sin, no suffering? Who wouldn't want that? And so that's not the reason people don't follow Jesus.

[2 : 40] It turns out, if we read John chapter 9, that the true reason people don't follow Jesus is because they're blind. You see, this chapter is all about a type of blindness that makes people unable to see the light of Jesus, and so unable to follow it.

And Jesus teaches about this very important spiritual truth, the spiritual blindness. He teaches us about it in a unique way. When he comes across a man in Jerusalem who is physically blind, he's been physically blind from birth.

He's never been able to see. He doesn't know what it is like to see. Imagine that. Imagine not knowing what sight even is. This man was blind from birth.

A very horrible impediment that meant that this guy was a beggar. He couldn't work. There was no social grants he could get in those days.

And so, as Jesus and his disciples are walking past this guy, his disciples start to ask him, you know, why? They start to theologically try to work out why this man is blind. Why he is suffering.

[3 : 46] But listen to what Jesus says. I'll pick it up from verse 3. This happened, he says, so that the works of God might be displayed in him, in this man. As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me.

Night is coming where no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world. Now, we know suffering is the inevitable result of living in a broken world. If you've been coming to church or reading your Bible for any length of time, you'll know that truth.

We suffer because we're in a fallen world. We're in a broken world. Sin has entered into this world and tainted everything. But we also learn in the Bible that some suffering God uses for good.

And sometimes what God chooses to do through the suffering of someone is more important than their comfort. And so he actually allows specific suffering to happen in the lives of people.

And you see it throughout Scripture, don't you? The suffering of Joseph in the Old Testament. The suffering of Job. The suffering of Jesus and Paul. They were all used by God to do something important.

[4 : 55] So important that their suffering was necessary. Even though it was unpleasant. It's one of the truths of life. And of course, if you're suffering, it's worth remembering this, isn't it?

That not all suffering is meaningless. In fact, for God's people, for God's children, who God doesn't want them to suffer if he loves them. He wants the best for his children.

But the Bible says some suffering is necessary and it always works for the good of his children.

God, for his children, uses all of their suffering for the ultimate good.

And it turned out that he did the same for this blind man in Jerusalem. We're told the reason he suffered this blindness, Jesus says, is so that the work of God might be displayed in him while it is still day, he says.

And he doesn't mean that he doesn't work at night. He's using that as a metaphor, of course. And he means while he is still on this earth, while he is still walking around, while he is still ministering on this earth, which Matthew, Mark, Luke and John recorded for us.

[6 : 02] That critical time in the history of our planet when Jesus was a man and was here. That is the day he's talking about when he has the chance to teach us these truths. And so he's saying this man's blindness was an opportunity for him to teach a vital spiritual lesson while he still could to us today about another type of blindness, a spiritual blindness, which is far worse than any physical blindness.

Because it has eternal consequences. And so this man, think about this. This man in Jerusalem, who lived there 2,000 years ago, was physically blind from birth.

Probably he's in, what, mid-30s, maybe 40s. For all those years, he was blind just so that you and I could learn something this morning. Just so that we could learn about this spiritual blindness.

That is how important it is. And so let's do that blind man the honor of making sure that we learn it this morning. That we don't think about what we're having for lunch or Christmas plans.

That we actually concentrate on this passage this morning and make sure we really understand what the story is all about. So will you do that this morning with me? But of course we can only understand what the story is all about if we carry on reading.

[7 : 17] So let's do that. So Jesus goes on to heal this man. With obvious creation power, he creates something from nothing. He gives this man sight that has never existed before.

But then, as we read on in the story, we realize that's not all Jesus gives this man, is it? Now it's at this point, after Jesus heals the sky, that Jesus kind of disappears from the story.

Until much later, the end of the chapter. And in the meantime, we focus in on what happens to this man after his healing. Specifically, we see how his understanding of who it was that healed him slowly changes over the course of the story.

So, look with me. First, verse 11. He refers to the man who healed him as the man they call Jesus. And so, at the beginning, to him, Jesus is just a man.

And all he knows about him is his name. Literally. But then, by verse 17, he admits Jesus must be a prophet. A man with God's words. And then, by verse 33, he confesses that Jesus must be from God.

[8 : 24] That he originated with God. And then, by the end, verse 38, he worships Jesus as his Lord and Master. And so, you see this story. As we read it, and it's important to read these narratives as a whole.

Not just to pick out verses from them. And, like, stick them on our fridge. You know, the Bible is given to us in these large narratives, which, as we read the whole thing, we start to see what it's about.

And this story is not just a story about a man gaining physical sight, is it? It's a story about him gaining spiritual sight to see who Jesus really is.

It's a story of how someone comes out of spiritual blindness to see the light for the first time. But there's something else going on in this story.

Because as this man slowly gains his spiritual sight to see who Jesus really is, there are also people who, at the same time, become more blind to it. And increasingly more aggressive towards the truth of Jesus.

[9 : 26] Now, it begins with an interrogation. So, this formerly blind man is brought to the Pharisees for questioning, like it's some kind of crime to be healed by Jesus. And we pick it up from verse 14.

Now, the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was the Sabbath. Again, Jesus, come on. He's obviously looking for trouble. You see, he wants to confront these Pharisees again.

He wants this to come out. Therefore, verse 15, the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. But, he put mud on my eyes, the man replied. And I washed, and now I see.

Okay, so it's a simple testimony. But it's one that the Pharisees don't want to hear, obviously. They don't want to hear that this Sabbath-breaker, Jesus of Nazareth, at least he's a Sabbath-breaker according to their traditions.

Not really according to the heart of the Old Testament law, but according to the laws that they made around that. He was a Sabbath-breaker. But they can't admit that this Sabbath-breaker has real creative power to do things like this.

[10 : 30] Power that only God could give. They don't want to admit that. Because to admit that would be to admit that they were wrong about Jesus, and they would have to change. They're not going to do that. And so they try to get this man to deny what happened.

But he just keeps telling the truth. And so then they decide to find his parents, to see if they can disprove that he was actually blind from birth. But of course, they only further confirm that he was.

And so they're a bit stuck. They don't know what to do. So they call this man in for round two.

Desperately trying to get some way around the facts. They don't want to change. So they don't want to hear the truth.

I mean, isn't that true? So many people in our world today will find any reason not to listen to what is obviously true because it means that it has implications for their lives.

When we come to church, we hear the Bible. What we're supposed to be hearing is how our lives need to change in response to God's Word.

[11 : 30] That is what the Bible will always challenge us to do. That is what truth will always challenge us to do from the Word. It will challenge us to change. One of our growth group questions, when we read a passage in our groups together, one of our growth group questions that we tackle every week is, how must I change my life in relation to this passage?

Every passage in the Bible challenges us to change in some way. The truth challenges us to change. And you know what? Because it challenges us to change and change is uncomfortable, many times our Bibles are like that, closed.

Because when we open it and we really understand it and we read it, it's uncomfortable. It was uncomfortable for these Pharisees. They're desperate to find a way around the truth.

And so, verse 24, The second time they summoned the man who had been blind. Give glory to God by telling the truth. You know, obviously you're lying because we don't like what you're saying.

We know this man is a sinner. So, basically, not only are they accusing him of lying, but they're telling him what they want him to say. They're saying, just admit this man is a sinner. And, of course, he simply replies to them, verse 25, Whether he's a sinner or not, I don't know.

[12 : 46] One thing I do know. I was blind, but now I see. And, again, they don't want to hear it, right? So, they asked him, verse 26, What did he do for you?

How did he open your eyes? Now, anybody ever been in a police interrogation room? Actually, you don't want to tell me, do you? Well, if you have, if you've ever been interrogated by the police, a common tactic in police interrogation rooms around the world is if you think the suspect is lying, you get them to retell their testimony over and over again until you find some discrepancies, right?

That's what police do when they think that the story they're hearing is made up. So, these Pharisees think they can do the same thing. They ask this guy to repeat and repeat the story until they find some kind of discrepancies.

They're desperately searching for some way to poke a hole in his story. But then his response to them is classic. Verse 27, 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? And so, this guy, by this point, is just getting fed up with the Pharisees obviously trying to deny the truth. [13:58] But, of course, they don't take that too well. In verse 28, they start hurling insults at him. And then they accuse him of heresy, not following the teachings of Moses.

They're obviously trying to intimidate him. They're trying to use their clout and their influence to intimidate this guy to shutting up. Don't we see that? All over. People with power and influence, when they hear something they don't want to hear, they'll try to use their influence to keep people quiet.

They'll try to threaten them. That's what these Pharisees are doing to this man. They're threatening him with an accusation of heresy, which is no small thing. And these guys are the top authorities of the day.

They were scary. And so you'd think by this point, any sensible person would back down and apologize for his outburst and say, yes, yes, I'm sorry.

I'm sorry, you're right. But not this guy. Now, he's not going to deny the truth. He's just seen for the first time. He's not going to keep quiet about that.

[15:03] And so this former beggar, this lowest of the low in society, stands in front of the top ruling council of Israel and basically tells them what idiots they are.

And it's beautiful. Verse 30, the man answered, now this is remarkable. You don't know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person 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. He is giving these Pharisees a theological lecture.

It's a beautiful scene, isn't it? This formerly blind beggar, probably with dirty clothes, standing in front of these great, rich, astute Pharisees, and he's lecturing them on theology.

It's beautiful. And he gives them an argument that you can't reply to. Obviously, if this man could heal a man who's never seen, he must be from God.

[16:11] And you know, the Pharisees can't argue with it, and they don't argue with it. Instead, you know what they do? Typical behavior, if you know you've lost an argument, what do you do if you know you've lost an argument? You shout.

You're louder. You try to shout the person down. That's what they do. They resort to shouting. And then they cast him out, which probably meant excommunication from the synagogue too.

But do you see how, over the course of the story, these Pharisees have slowly increased their aggression to this man as he keeps on telling them the plain truth?

So they start, look at the progression. They start at the beginning of the story with questioning the man. Then they pressure him to say what they want. Then they intimidate him and threaten him. Then they insult him.

Then they shout at him. And then finally they cast him out. All because they're unwilling to admit the truth about Jesus. And they become more and more hardened in their stance against Jesus as the story goes on.

[17:10] And so you see, the story isn't just about a man progressing in his spiritual sight. It's also about how the Pharisees progress in their spiritual blindness at the same time. Which at the end of the story, when Jesus meets up with this man again, is exactly what he says is the inevitable result of light coming into this world.

That is what happens when light comes. It will increase the sight of some and increase the blindness of others. Verse 39, 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 too? Jesus said, If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin. But now that you claim to see, your guilt remains.

So Jesus came into this world to be light. To show us the way to God. To show us the way to eternal life. But the same light that guides some people can also blind others.

It can make them increasingly unable to see the way to God. And it turns out, it's the very people who think they can see the way to God without Jesus, who are the ones who end up blinded.

[18 : 33] Because that's what light tends to do, doesn't it? So imagine, imagine you're driving on a road, and it's getting dark. End of the day, twilight's getting dark, you're driving on this road, but you don't switch on your headlights yet, because you know this road, you've driven here a thousand times before, and you can still make out where the road's going.

But then imagine, another car is coming in the opposite direction with its brights on. Right? And for a few moments, it's intense light, and then it passes by. What's happened to your eyesight? You can't make out the road anymore, can you?

You can't see the road that you thought you could see, because of the brightness of this car. The light has blinded you. And you see, Jesus is saying that's what happens spiritually too, when Jesus, the light, the intense light of Jesus, comes close to you, comes into contact with you.

Either you will turn from your own way, and follow that light on a new path, or like these Pharisees, you will carry on going in the opposite direction, more blind than ever.

That is the result of this intense light of truth coming into our world. There are only one of two reactions. And so what's your reaction? When you come to church, when you sit under the teaching of the word, when you are exposed to the light of Jesus, how do you react to that?

[19 : 53] Do you follow it? Do you turn and change, and follow that light? Or do you ignore it? Do you go out of those doors, and nothing's changed?

Well, you see, that'll all depend on whether you believe yourself to be blind or not. Jesus says to these Pharisees, verse 41, if you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin, but now that you claim to see, your guilt remains.

And so the reason, this is very important, the reason these Pharisees grew in their blindness, was that they claimed to see.

They thought they knew a way to God without Jesus. They thought that they were good enough, that their religion was good enough, their lifestyle was good enough for God, they didn't need Jesus, to die for their sins.

And millions of people today, think the same thing, don't they? And that is why they are blind. Because they think they can see the way to God. Well, if you think that of yourself this morning, if you think you're good enough to live this life without Jesus, that you're good enough to go into a new week, and not give Jesus a second thought, without the need to follow and worship him, like this man ended up doing.

[21 : 20] If you think that you don't need Jesus to save you from your sins, and guide you to new life, well then not only are you blind to the truth, but you will become stubbornly more so as time goes on.

This story is here to convince us how much we need Jesus, in order to see truth. that without Jesus there is no life, and there is no way to God.

And Jesus has come to this world to offer you sight, to help you to see, spiritual sight, to see truths, to see the way to eternity, to see your life in a whole new light, so that you live in a completely different way, because you know that this few decades on this planet is only the beginning.

Jesus has offered the big picture to you. And the only qualification to get that sight from Jesus, is to admit that you're blind, and that you can't see it without him.

And then come to him. And when you do that, he will open your eyes to see things that you could never see before. All you've got to do is listen to him, and do what he says, like this blind man.

[22 : 41] It's not for no reason that Jesus had to tell this man to do something, in order to be healed. He put this mud in his eyes, and he said, go wash in the pool of Siloam. This man had a role to play in responding to Jesus.

He wasn't just passive. He can't just sit here passively in church, and listen, and go away. We've got to respond to the truth of Jesus. And when you do, you will have your eyes opened.

So will you do that if you haven't yet? If you're still wondering about the way to God, if you're still wondering about eternity, if you're not absolutely 100% sure of what will happen to you when you die, will you come to Jesus, and ask him to open your eyes?

Which of course he will do, through the word, and through his spirit. But there's one last thing we learned from the story this morning, and that is what to expect once you do come to see, once your spiritual eyes are opened, and you turn your life around to follow Jesus.

We discover in this chapter what that will really mean, what it will look like in your life. See, unlike most of the other chapters in John, this chapter is different, chapter 9, because the main character

of this chapter isn't Jesus.

[23 : 53] The main character of this chapter is the man who was healed. The formerly blind man, because this story is here to show us what it looks like to be a follower of Jesus.

What it looks like once you've had your sight given to you by him. What does that mean for your life? You see, this man is actually a model of discipleship.

He is a model of what it means to follow Jesus. And he is in at least two ways. Firstly, in how he witnesses the truth to others. Notice how he does it.

Simply, honestly, and according to his own experience. He doesn't get involved in big theological debates on Facebook. Partly because they didn't have Facebook then.

But he doesn't get caught up in arguments. All he does is to tell these people what happened to him. The plain truth.

[24 : 50] A witness of his own experience. Because see, not every Christian can engage in deep theological debate. Not every Christian can be a preacher, or an evangelist.

But every Christian can give this testimony. One thing I do know. I was blind, but now I see. And if that's your testimony, if you've come to see the truth of Jesus, that's what you need to share with others.

It's just a matter of sharing your own experience of Jesus with someone else. It's really not that difficult. Because if you are a true Christian, then you have an experience of Jesus coming into your life and opening your eyes.

And that is the experience that you need to share with others. So that they might see the light too.

It's not hard. And yet, it does take boldness. Like it did for this man.

Because the second truth we learn here about disciples is that they will be persecuted for telling the truth by those who are blind to it. You see, this man was intimidated by those who didn't want to hear the truth.

[25 : 59] And then he was insulted and then he was persecuted. He was cast out. And the same will happen in some way or another, at some level or another, to all true disciples who share their experience of the truth.

It's happening right now in countries like Syria and Iraq and China. And not only there, increasingly, in previously Christianized countries, the United Kingdom, the United States, France, Sweden, and increasingly in South Africa, Christians are being told to shut up.

They're being told what they should say and what they shouldn't say. And they're being cast out and intimidated when they do say what they're not supposed to say because they're sharing a truth that people don't want to hear.

My question to you this morning is, if you are a Christian, when this intimidation reaches your life, and it will if it hasn't already, when you are pressured to keep quiet about the truth because of what people might do or say, what are you going to do?

Are you going to tell the politically correct line and tell them what they want to hear? Which is very easy to do. Or, are you going to be like this man who tells the truth that he's experienced despite the consequences that he knew would come?

[27 : 27] Because after a lifetime of blindness, he had come to see Jesus and what he saw changed his life. So much so that he couldn't keep quiet about it.

Has it changed your life to that extent? As you go into a new week, as you head to Christmas on the weekend, next Monday, and you get those opportunities to talk about Jesus, which the world has actually forgotten Christmas is all about.

And so it gives us those natural opportunities to talk about our experience of Jesus and the truth of Jesus we've come to see with people who haven't. When you get those opportunities, will you remember this man in John chapter 9 and how unashamed he was to tell the truth?

And will you go out and do the same? Let's pray for boldness to do that. Yes, Lord, we thank you for this account in John chapter 9 of what it means to be healed of spiritual blindness and what that means for our lives.

We do pray, Lord, that we would see this formerly blind man as an example to us, as an example of discipleship. Help us, Lord, to be bold and ready and willing to tell the truth, the plain truth, nothing but the truth, of what you have done in our lives as Christians.

[28 : 50] Help us to be bold irrespective of what consequences that may cause. Help us to realize that people are hostile to us because they are blind to the truth and, Lord, give them sight through

our testimony, we pray.

I pray also for anybody who's in this church this morning who has not yet come to see the truth of Jesus, who has not yet come to put their hope and their trust in Him, who has not yet turned around to follow Him in their life.

Lord, would you open their eyes this morning? Would you cause them to see Jesus in a whole new light? Would you help them, Lord, to see that He offers them sight and healing and forgiveness for their sins against God and He shows them the way to intimacy with God and a new life.

Help them to see that way and to walk it. Help us all to walk the way that Jesus calls us to walk in the coming weeks and months. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[30 : 08] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.