

Spiritual Blindness and the Light of the World

John 9:1-12

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TRANSCRIPT:

Heavenly Father, we pray for Your illumination today, that You'd help us to understand this portion of Scripture that we are about to look into. So Father, I pray that You would help us to understand these truths that we may apply to live the fullest Christian life that we can possibly live. In Jesus' name, Amen.

So, I'll get you to open your Bibles to John Chapter 9. John Chapter 9, and we're going to read the first 12 verses. Zach kindly read for us 13 and beyond, but we're going to focus on the first 12 verses, starting from verse 1:

Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" And Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. I must work the works of Him who sent me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." 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. 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. Therefore the neighbors and those who previously had seen that he was blind said, "Is not this he who sat and begged?" Some said, "This is he." Others said, "He is like him." He said, "I am he." Therefore they said to him, "How were your eyes opened?" 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." Then they said to him, "Where is He?" He said, "I do not know."

John Chapter 9 is one of the seven signs that is written by the Apostle John. In the last couple of chapters, in John 20:31, he says that these signs were written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and that believing you may have life in His name. So these seven signs are seven miracles that Jesus did to authenticate who He was

as a person, that He was proclaiming to be the Son of God, that He was the promised Messiah. And so these signs serve as an authentication process for Jesus to validate His claims that He is who He truly says He is.

Now before we get into John Chapter 9, we need the greater context. And so we're going to look at John Chapter 8 and summarize what's there. So in John Chapter 8, there is an annual feast, an annual weeklong feast being celebrated, and it continues all the way into John Chapter 9. This feast is known as the Feast of Tabernacles. The Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated by the Jews, and it basically commemorated God's provision and protection of the Israelites in the wilderness. Now this festival incorporated things like sacrifices, wave offerings, prayers for rain because it was a harvest festival, singing, dancing. And here they're celebrating this festival at the temple in Jerusalem. Now it was an annual pilgrimage where all the male Jews had to attend. But at this festival, there's controversy brewing between Jesus and the Pharisees and scribes. There's controversy over His words and His actions, His deeds, His miracles. We have in the beginning of John Chapter 8 a woman caught in adultery. And the controversy surrounding that is that Jesus chooses to show mercy instead of condemnation. The Pharisees brought her to Jesus that He would condemn her, but the Pharisees ended up dispersing with conviction because Jesus chose to show mercy and compassion.

And then we have the Sabbath healings all throughout John, where Jesus was healing on the Sabbath day, and the Jews took issue with that because they considered that work on the Sabbath. We also see that Jesus was drawing crowds to Himself. People were astonished at His teaching, a unique message He was bringing to them. Because they were astonished at His teaching, they received His message, and the religious teachers of His time thought He was a rogue. They thought He was a rebel. And so what we have is this familiar arena of Pharisees and scribes pitted against Jesus. We have these lawyers and religious teachers who are seeking to kill Jesus.

Now why is that? Well, beyond the controversy, we see that Jesus challenged their spiritual state. He said to them that their father was a devil. He alluded to the fact that they were in darkness, that they don't know what they're doing. He said that they were blind, that they don't know where they're going. In Matthew 23:16, Jesus calls them blind guides. Jesus also says that they are deceived. They think they know the truth, but they don't. And so what we have is a form of religious pride where, in their ignorance, they refuse to acknowledge Christ in all His glory. He also says to them that they are slaves to sin, that they have no power, that they have no freedom, and nothing they can do to liberate themselves from this slavery, for their master is unrighteousness. Their heart is given over to sin.

Now what we also see is that there's controversy over His identity. Who is Jesus? Who does this man claim to be? Is He Lord? Is He a liar? Is He a madman? In John 8:58, Jesus says the famous words, "Before Abraham was, I am." That is a direct reference to Exodus 3, where Moses is being called by God to be the physical representative of deliverance for the Jews in Egypt. Moses says to God, "What shall I tell the children of Israel about who sent me?" And God says, "Tell them that I AM sent you." And so the Jews knew very well what Jesus was saying in John 8:58. He was proclaiming deity. He was the divine I AM. You look at the last verse of John Chapter 8, we'll see that the Jews try to pick up stones and kill Him. But Jesus was able to slip past them.

As He slipped past them, we come to John Chapter 9. He was passing by, and He came past a blind man. This blind man was someone that was ignored in society. He was not very esteemed. He was part of the lower classes of society. He was considered an outcast. He was considered a bad omen. We see another example in Matthew Chapter 20 with two blind men seated outside the city of Jericho. With the blind, the lame, the sick, diseased, the leprous, they were unwanted. They were outcasts. But at the same time, this blind man becomes a person of interest. A person of interest. Look in verse 2. Becomes a person of interest. The disciples actually raise a very important theological question about sin and suffering. If you look in verse 2, it says, "Rabbi, who sinned? This man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

Now this question reveals a common assumption in ancient times that suffering is always a result of personal sin. That suffering is always a result of personal sin. And Jesus actually kicks back against this idea. And notice that they also had strong and negative views about blindness, how they were outcasts and bad omens. Now, common assumptions. I remember when I was in school, we had a librarian who we gave a hard time to. And she came to us, and she said, "Did you know liars grow pimples?" And I'm with my mates, and we're looking around, and we all have pimple-ridden faces. And we're all thinking about our sins, how we're all sinners, and how we're all liars. And for a time, I started to reflect on all my sins because she said that. I didn't know whether to take it seriously, but at that point in time, I was. And she held a straight face. And the fact is that we all believed, my group of friends, in shock and horror, all believed that assumption or that lie at that time. And we gave energy to that because we believed it, and it became a common assumption between us. It's the same thing here. It was superstitious with the ancient Near East.

In Jesus' time, blindness was thought to be a curse or divine punishment. Blindness was thought to be a universal symbol of ignorance and weak-

ness. These people thought that if you were blind, your heart and soul was filled with evil. If your soul was dark, you had no inner light, which you needed to see. The popular saying, "Eyes provide a direct window to the soul," well, this was very real to them. Because this man was blind, they assumed he had no inner light, which meant shame and guilt, that he was a bad omen, and that no one would ever see him again. They assumed he had no inner light, which meant shame and guilt, that he was a bad omen, and that no one wanted to associate with him. What the ancient people believed was that the light exited from your eye, but the source of the light that enabled you to see came from the fire or light in your soul. So light emerged from one's heart and exited through the eyes so that the person could see. Those who were blind were said to have darkness or the absence of light in their hearts, which is why they could not see and which is why they were frowned upon in society.

They also believed in the idea known as the evil eye, where if you had malice, envy, or ill will, or hate stored up in your heart, that it could reach out through your eyes and inflict harm on the person you're looking at. They believed that you can touch another person with your eyes. To gaze upon someone or something was similar to grasping that thing or touching it. How many of you have ever felt a creepy stare? You know someone's looking at you. I'm sure many of you have felt a creepy stare. So the common thought back then was that the eye was able to touch another person.

But back to the question that they ask, Jesus responds in two ways to that question. Number one, He alludes to the fact that no specific sin is responsible. No specific sin is responsible for his blindness. So personal sin and suffering are not always related. Suffering is not always a direct result of personal sin. I'm going to take it to Luke 13 to prove that point because Jesus rejects the idea that tragedies are judgment for sin. So in Luke 13, we have the Galileans who were slaughtered by Pilate when they're sacrificing in the temple. And the people think that they were slaughtered because they were great sinners. And Jesus actually pushes against that. And then Jesus actually talks about the tower at Siloam which fell on 18 individuals. And He actually says they didn't die because they were great sinners. But the thing that Jesus does with these tragedies is that He says that these should cause you to reflect on your own spiritual state instead of judging the sin of others. Well, how do we know this? Because He tells them to repent after each of those two occasions.

The second way Jesus responds is that He reframes their perspective from a negative perspective to a positive one. He says that God wants to display His work and bring glory to His name in that. And so this blind man becomes a vessel for God. He becomes a recipient of God's grace, of God's miraculous power. But then we see in this, later on in chapter 9, that he

becomes a witness for Christ. And so God is using him as a vessel. I did say that the blind man was a person of interest. And I also mean this, that he's also a suspect. He is a suspect for the case against Jesus, about the potential religious crime that Jesus has committed. And so chapter 9 is really about the blind man being investigated. And we see that the Pharisees don't really care that he was healed. They don't care about that. They want to incriminate Jesus. And so there's this investigation underway. I should say there's an inquisition underway. We have the inquisitors who are the Pharisees, who are intensely questioning him, intensely questioning him, and scrutinizing everything that he's saying. It goes to show you their spiritual blindness.

So what is spiritual blindness? Spiritual blindness is the inability to perceive the truth, the inability to perceive the truth of God. What you see during the inquisition is they're questioning, they're trying to find loopholes in the answers that this blind man is giving. They don't want to believe that Jesus is the Christ or the Messiah. They flat out reject it. And so they are finding loopholes to incriminate Jesus and discredit who He is as a person. Spiritual blindness is deception. John 5:46-47 says, "For had you believed in Moses, you would have believed Me, for he wrote of Me. But if you believe not his writings, how shall you believe My words?" In verse 28, these Pharisees say, "We are Moses' disciples." An arrogant statement. But Jesus says, "No, you're not. You don't even believe his writings. If you believed his writings, you would believe in Me." So what we have are teachers of the law that don't actually believe the scriptures. Jesus says, "Search the scriptures. I am the prophetic fulfillment from Abraham all the way to John the Baptist."

We see that spiritual blindness is also a hardened heart. There's unfeeling. They are unmoved, and they ultimately reject this person, Jesus, and His message. How do we know specifically that these Pharisees were spiritually blind? Well, if you look in verse 16, they flat out say that Jesus is not from God. He's a Sabbath breaker. He's unholy. He's a liar. He's a Sabbath breaker. He's unholy. He's a sinner. At one point, they say that He's doing all these miracles by the power of the devil. In verse 22, they basically persecute or kick out anyone from the synagogue who says that Jesus is the Christ. They profess that He is not the Christ. They are Christ deniers. Anyone who sympathizes with that sentiment is kicked out. And if you look in verse 24, they call Jesus a sinner.

Because spiritual blindness is the inability to perceive God's truth, it means people are in darkness. And darkness, of course, is a spiritual metaphor for dark hearts that reject the truth. The difference between a physically blind person and a spiritually blind person is that a physically blind person knows that he's blind. He bumps into furniture. He has a white mobility

cane to help him navigate. He has Braille to help him read. But a spiritually blind person most of the time doesn't know they're blind. So this darkness is characterized by ignorance. They deny the true light and create their own light. They become foolish. They become, excuse the use of the word, idiots. They become idiotic. That word comes from "idios" in the Greek, which means one's own, to do things your own way. They're idiotic. They create their own light. Darkness is characterized by death as well. So if light equals life, then darkness must equal death. Those that abide in darkness are dead to spiritual things. They are separated from God.

But there's hope because in verse 5 of chapter 9, Jesus says that He's the light of the world. Now this title Jesus claims for Himself really speaks into many aspects about His character, about His mission, about who He is as a person. What does "light of the world" mean? What does that mean? Well, let me refer you back to the Feast of Tabernacles, which I referenced earlier in my introduction. Now in that feast, they had a lamp lighting ceremony. Now at this ceremony, there were large golden lampstands that were set up in the temple at the Court of the Women. And these large golden lampstands were about 22 meters tall. They were very high. Now to light them, they used worn-out priest garments and oil. They mixed them together and put them on this drum on top, and they lit them. They lit these massive lampstands at night, which illuminated the temple. And some say it illuminated much of Jerusalem at that time. And people would sing and dance and praise God as it was symbolic of a number of things.

Firstly, it was symbolic of God as the pillar of fire in the wilderness. Remember, the Feast of Tabernacles is celebrating the wilderness wanderings that God was able to provide for them. It's symbolic of the pillar of fire that was in the wilderness for 40 years. And so God's presence was with them, and that was celebrated. It also served to be a reminder that Israel were called to be a light to the nations. And perhaps more importantly, at this festival, Jesus took the opportunity to proclaim to His hearers, to His disciples, and those that were around, that He was the light of the world, that He brings illumination. That He is the light that penetrates the darkness, that He is the light that the darkness cannot comprehend.

The title "Light of the World" also suggests that He reveals the truth. Truth about His person, His word, His miracles. As I said earlier, they authenticate Him as a person. He also reveals our spiritual state, just like He did in John chapter 8 with those Pharisees. There is a wall of partition that separates us between God and ourselves, and that iniquity is the cause of that. It tells us that we are slaves to sin, that we are unable to free ourselves. No manumission, no freedom movement, no political movement can ever free you. We hear about William Wilberforce and his petition and his lobbying for the abolition of slavery, and he succeeded, he did. And that was great.

But he cannot save you from your sin. No legislation, no law, no policies, nothing that man can conjure up can ever free you from your sin. Save Jesus Christ.

We see that the light of the world also gives life. Light is essential for life. How do we know this? We see this in nature. Plant life will die without light. We ourselves become vitamin D deficient without light. We cannot regulate our sleep-wake cycle without light. Prolonged darkness can cause mental health issues. We cannot grow food crops without light. Life would become unsustainable after months or years. But God provides natural light to sustain life. But even more so, more importantly, God provides eternal life through Jesus. The Bible says that in Him was life, and the light was the life of men.

And so the gospel that saves is a gospel that needs to go out. And we have a duty as a church to proclaim the good news that Jesus Christ died, was buried, and rose again bodily on the third day. There's no greater message than that. So how do we apply John chapter 9, what we've read, to our lives? What can we take away from that? Well, number one, Christians can have blind spots. We can develop spiritual cataracts where the lens of our eye becomes distorted or blurred due to pride, or anger, or bitterness, or hypocrisy, or hate. It can also cause us to be spiritually deaf as well. A spiritually deaf person tends to be one with a rebellious heart because he or she cannot hear divine instruction. And so we must be aware of the pitfalls and the traps that lay before us, and that requires us to seek for discernment. And sometimes we need to be brutally honest with ourselves. And sometimes we need to be brutally honest with ourselves and come to our knees and repent. When we see these things, when we see these sins in our lives that so easily beset us.

Number two, Jesus calls us to be a light to the world. Just as Jesus is the supreme light penetrating the darkness, so God calls us to be a light to a dark world. This means following Him. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness." It means we have the light of life. We embody this light of life so that others can see that we are a beacon of hope. We embody this light of life so that others can see that we are a beacon of hope, a holy people set apart for God. That we are the church of God, a lighthouse in a fractured society, in a broken world.

Number three, what John chapter 9 shows us is that we must be ready for diligent gospel witness. The blind man had the opportune moment to testify of what Jesus did for him. He did not shrink in fear. He did not fear the Pharisees. He did not alter his words to soothe their ears. This blind man was cast out of the temple because of his unwavering witness. So what does this blind man teach us? Well, that we must be confident and

clear about what Jesus has done for us. You know, when he was kicked out of the temple, you know what it says in verse 35? When Jesus heard he was kicked out of the temple, Jesus went and looked for him, and He found him. What you see is that Jesus has this sweet conversation with him. And Jesus reveals Himself to him completely.

So we must be confident and clear about what Jesus has done for us through His gospel. There is no room for doubt. There is no room for confusion. There is no room for hypocrisy. Any of those things. Hebrews 11:6 says, "Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that seek Him diligently." See, our gospel witness is founded upon a sure faith. The one that may require us to make sacrifices. It may involve us being kicked out of the workplace, separated from our families, dispersed from our friendship groups. We need to know the cost of discipleship, what it means to follow Jesus. Are you willing to sacrifice all on the altar for Christ?

Let us be sturdy and strong, courageous witnesses for Christ, because He is the hope of humanity. And that's my final point. Jesus Christ is the hope of humanity. Jesus Christ is the hope of humanity. Our message is about a person. It's not about a method. It's about the person, the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Jesus said He is the light of the world, and His light must touch our hearts if we are to be free and delivered from any kind of bondage. He is the liberator. He is our redeemer. And the message that we preach, our gospel, is this: that Jesus died, was buried, and rose again bodily for our sins, for the sins of the world. This is the message that we need to proclaim daily, even if it means preaching it to ourselves. Because in that message, you find strength to crucify your own flesh, to set your affections on things above. But we must understand that Jesus is the only hope for this broken and fractured world. And without Him, there is no salvation.

Let's pray.