

March 28/29, 2020

I Was Blind, Now I See
These Things are Written that You May Believe Series
John 9:1-41
Pastor Bryan Clark

I think many of us are familiar with Hans Christian Andersen's famous children's story, *The Emperor's New Clothes*. If you're not, it's a story about a couple of rogue weavers that come to town. They're con artists and they're trying to convince the Emperor that they have magic thread to make magic clothes. What makes it magic is the only ones that can see the clothing, are those that are fit for office, are those that are extraordinary. And so the king loves his wardrobe and agrees to have clothes made from this magic thread. So the weavers begin. Well, the king gets curious and sends officials down to check on the progress. They're aware of what makes the thread magic, so even though they can't see anything, they're not gonna admit they're not fit for office, and so they talk about how beautiful it is and the colors and the texture. Several bring back positive reports to the king, and finally the day comes when the wardrobe is ready. They introduce it to the king and he's a bit puzzled. He can't see it but he's not going to admit that he's not fit for office, so he acts like he can see it—and it's beautiful and he loves it. So then they set up a parade where the king is going to go through town and he's going to put on display his new wardrobe. All of the people know what makes it magic, so they're not going to say they can't see it. So the king parades through town with nothing on—everyone pretending that he's wearing clothing—until finally it comes to a child. And the child has the honesty to say, “The king's not wearing any clothes!” The people gasp and all admit that, yes, that's what they all were seeing or not seeing, if you will.

Well, that story reminds me a lot of the story we're going to talk about today, only instead of a child, it's a blind beggar that has the courage to finally tell the truth. So I invite you to turn with us to the Gospel of John, Chapter nine. If you're new with us, we're working our way through the Gospel of John. We find ourselves in chapter nine. So, chapter seven was a long discourse, a conversation with the Jews, mostly the religious leaders. Jesus is trying to explain to them that He has come from the Father—sent from the Father—to tell them the truth and to die on the cross to be their Savior, but they're unwilling to listen. Jesus says it's because they believe the lie of the devil, and the devil says religion and self-righteousness can make you acceptable to God. So that comes out of chapter eight, now into chapter nine. We pick it up in verse 1:

As He passed by, He saw a blind man from birth. And His disciples asked Him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?” (*NASB, John 9:1-2)

So in that culture, if you were blind, which actually was relatively common, you had no real way to survive but to beg, and so the man is begging. Jesus and His disciples come across him and I would say the disciples' question is more curiosity than compassion, but they want to know who sinned, that he was born blind. And it's interesting they say, “*Was it him or his parents?*” That raises an interesting question, “How could he sin before he was born?” But the rabbis taught that, for example, if his mother was pregnant and went to a pagan temple, he too was guilty of idolatry. And that was his sin. Well, that seems odd to us. It *is* odd, but there's a deeper issue going on and that is that the Jews believed if you were blind, if you were sick, if you were deformed in some way, it was God's punishment. You had done something, and God was punishing you. This raises an interesting question. “Did the rest of them think they were sinless because they were healthy and not blind?”

It's just a messed-up theology, but it's a theology I bump into all the time today. I have people sit in my office, and maybe they have some disease they're fighting or things are going badly in their life, and they ask the question, "Is God mad at me? Is God punishing me? I mean, why is He doing this to me?" And it's just a bad theology that thinks if I'm sick, if I have cancer, if I get a virus, that God's mad at me and He's punishing me. The truth is we live in a fallen world and there's sin, and there's heartache, and there's disease, and there's brokenness. It's just part of living in this world.

Jesus answered, "It was neither *that* this man sinned, nor his parents; but *it* was so that the works of God might be displayed in him. We must work the works of God who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world." (Vs. 3-5)

So Jesus immediately says, "That's bad theology; it's neither." And then what He essentially says is, "*But this is a moment where He can demonstrate His power, in order that people would see that He is God in the flesh, come to be the Savior of the world.*" Now it is possible, halfway through verse 3, that there could be a period at the end of parents, and then a new sentence starts up so:

It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents. But it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him. We must work the works of Him who sent me. . .

There are some scholars that think it reads that way, that grammar allows it, but essentially Jesus is saying that time is running out. "While I'm in the world there is a Light in the world. But there isn't much time left and it's going to be darkness. So if people are going to accept and believe, then there aren't many of these moments remaining." This gets us then to verse 6:

When He had said this, He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and applied the clay to his eyes, and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is translated, Sent). So he went away and washed, and came *back* seeing. (Vs. 6-7)

Now this is kind of an odd miracle. Why does Jesus spit on the ground in the clay and mix up some clay, stick it in his eyes and send him all the way to the pool, which actually was quite a distance, and for a blind man would have been a relatively difficult journey? Why didn't He just say something? Why didn't He just touch them? He did that on many other occasions. But this particular miracle is filled with symbolism. So we're just coming off the Feast of Tabernacles, probably days or maybe a few weeks after that, and there was a lot of symbolism in that feast that we talked about. So when Jesus spits in the clay and mixes it up, part of what He's identifying is what John says in the opening of his Gospel.

So in John chapter one, verses one through five, he identifies Jesus as the eternal Son of God. He was God; He was with God, and Jesus is the Creator of the universe. He said that *all things that exist were made by Him*, which means then that Jesus was the God of Genesis 2, that He essentially rolled up His sleeves and created Adam from the dust. The language is: "He formed him into a man," which is pottery terminology. So the first creation was the "Potter" taking clay and making a man. So just like Jesus was the "I AM" out of the burning bush to Moses, Jesus was the "Finger" that wrote the Ten Commandments to Moses, and Jesus was the "Creator God" of Genesis 2. So the clay is symbolism that Jesus has come to usher in a new creation, to bring new life, to bring redemption to make all things new. So every time Jesus does a healing, it's actually a glimpse of what one day will be the fulfillment of the promise that He will make all things new, that He will bring ultimate redemption and healing. So you get just little glimpses of it. It is new creation; it's re-creations—it's born again.

It's the beginning of a new story. So the Creator is recreating, and so when you're talking about somebody who's been blind since birth, you're talking about somebody whose eyes never worked. They've always been defective. They don't just need to be fixed; they need to be re-created. So the clay is symbolic of that.

So then he goes, what would have been a fair distance, through the streets. Perhaps some of that was to test his obedience, perhaps maybe to get people to notice that this miracle was going on. It certainly would have caught people's attention. But mostly he went to the pool of Siloam, and John makes sure we understand that the Hebrew, *Siloam*, means "*Sent*". So he's gonna wash in the same water that was used for the procession for the Feast of Tabernacles when they did the water procession, and Jesus identified Himself as the "Water of Life". So all the symbolism here is that the One who has come to issue new life—new creation—sends him to the pool. So the pool is named "Sent," and this is what Jesus has been saying to them over and over again. I am *sent* from the Father. So where does he go? He goes to the pool called "Sent" and he washes in the water that Jesus has identified with, "I am the Water of Life." His eyes are opened and he sees, which is the picture of light, and Jesus has just identified Himself as the *Light of the World*. "*Those who come to Me will receive the Light of Life.*" So there's all this symbolism in this moment. I am the *Sent One* who is the *Water*, who is the *Light*, and He's bringing *re-creation*. The man who was blind now can see. So there's a lot of imagery in this miracle. Verse 8:

Therefore the neighbors, and those who previously saw him as a beggar, were saying, "Is not this the one who used to sit and beg?" Others were saying, "This is he," still others were saying, "No, but he is like him." He kept saying, "I am the one." (Vs. 8-9)

So he goes back, and friends and neighbors are trying to figure out if this is the same guy. Some think he is; some think he's not. So you have this debate going back and forth, and the blind man is saying, "**I am the one.**" Now that "**I am**" is actually the exact same Greek construction as the end of chapter 8, verse 58, when Jesus said, "*I say to you, before Abraham was born, I AM.*" So part of this little story is like an image of the bigger story going on. You have two groups of people. They're debating whether this is the one or not, and he's saying, "**I am the one.**" And that's kind of a picture of the bigger story that's happening here.

So they were saying to him, "How then were your eyes opened?" (This will be the question that will be repeated again and again through the story. "How did this happen?") **He answered, "The man who is called Jesus made clay, and anointed my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash'; so I went away and washed and I received sight." They said to him, "Where is He?" He said, "I do not know." (Vs. 10-12)**

So he tells them how this happened. But the people are confused, and when you're confused, you go find the local Pharisee at the synagogue and ask him what's going on. So that's what they do. Verse 13:

They brought to the Pharisees the man who was formerly blind. Now it was a Sabbath on the day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. (Vs. 13-14)

We have to chuckle when we read that because we know what's coming. We've seen this before, and it's kind of a, "Oh, boy, this is not gonna go well. Jesus broke the rules again."

Then the Pharisees also were asking him again, how (Here's our question.) he received his sight. And he said to them, "He applied clay to my eyes, and I washed, and I see." Therefore some of the Pharisees were saying, "This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath." But others were saying, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And there was a division among them. So they said to the blind man again, "What do you say about Him, since He opened your eyes?" And he said, "He is a prophet." (Vs.15-17)

So the Pharisees are trying to figure out who Jesus is. There's a group of them that conclude that He's just a sinner. He broke the rules. He broke the Sabbath—and of course it's their version of the Sabbath. And they identified two things, the *clay*—*making* the clay—and the *healing* itself. Now we've seen this before, but if there was a man who had been born blind and suddenly in a moment could see, wouldn't you stop and ask yourself the question, "Who is this man that He makes the blind to see?" But they are so entrenched in their religion, all they can think about is, "He must be a sinner; He broke the rules." But there's another part of the Pharisees that are wrestling with the question, "If He's a sinner, how could He do this?" You remember Nicodemus was a Pharisee. It's possible he was in this group and maybe even leading this conversation. If He's such a sinner, how is it that He could do this miracle? So they're disputing among themselves, and I think it's really interesting that just a few hours earlier, this was a blind beggar that nobody cared about. Now the religious experts are asking him his theological opinion. And it is interesting that they say in verse 17 **...since He opened your eyes?** There's no debating that. And since that happened, who do you think He is? And he identifies Him as a **prophet**.

The Jews then did not believe *it* of him, that he had been blind and had received sight, until they called the parents of the very one who had received his sight, and questioned them, saying, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? Then how does he now see?" His parents answered them and said, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but how he now sees, we do not know; or who opened his eyes, we do not know. Ask him; he is of age, he will speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone confessed Him to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue. For this reason, his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." (Vs.18-23)

So the Pharisees can't deny the fact that the blind man can see. So Plan B is: I'm not sure that this guy was ever blind. You know, it's like a trick or something, so let's go find his parents. And we have three questions. Number one is, "Is this your son?" Number two, "Was he blind from birth?" And number three, "How does he see?" So they answer yes to question number one, "Yes, this is our son. Yes, he was blind from birth." Question number three, "I don't know...I don't know...you're gonna have to ask him." Now their response is really curious. You'd think if parents had a son who had been blind from birth, and all his life he had been a beggar, and now, suddenly, in a moment he could see, it would be party time. It would be time to celebrate! This was an amazing moment! But instead, these parents basically distance themselves from their own son, and maybe more than that, kind of throw him under the bus. They don't want anything to do with this. They're like, "I don't know. He's old enough to answer your questions. Ask him," which raises the question, "What's going on?" And John tells us it's because they were afraid. They were afraid of the religious leaders. The religious leaders had decided if anyone identified with the Christ, they were to be put out of the synagogue. And we need to understand, for them, that would have meant there was no chance of experiencing favor with God. This is the challenge. The religious leaders position themselves in a place where in order to get to God, you had to go through *them*. So if you get them angry, if you disagree with them, if they put

you out of the synagogue, you have no chance to get to God. So the religious leaders are saying, “The emperor is wearing magic clothes, and it doesn't matter what you see, you better agree with that, or you stand no chance of getting to God.” So in this moment, they're so afraid of that, that they actually kind of throw their son under the bus and distance themselves from him.

Now this is still a problem, as religious leaders position themselves as someone you need, in order to get to God. So you better agree with them. You better not upset them. You better not make them angry. If the religious leaders say the emperor's new clothes are beautiful, you better say they're beautiful. Otherwise you get put out, and you stand no chance of getting to God. I've said many times, “Religion is about power and control—and this is at the core of that power and control.” “Without *us* you can't get to God.” So you have no choice but to agree with them, even though it seems obvious, the emperor's not wearing clothes. So that's what's happening here. Verse 24:

So a second time they called the man who had been blind, and said to him, “Give glory to God; we know that this man is a sinner.”

What they just said there is that we know He's a sinner, so He didn't do this, so stop lying and tell the truth. So these are the religious leaders saying, “We all know the emperor's new clothes are beautiful, so you need to say it too.” That's what they just said. Verse 25:

He then answered, “Whether He is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I do know, is that though I was blind, now I see.”

This is a great response. He kind of stays out of the argument and says, “I don't really know about that.” This is just a poor beggar. He's not a theologian. This is what I know: “**I was blind, now I see.**”

So they said to him, “What did He do to you?” (Here's our question again.) **“How did He open your eyes?”** He answered them, **“I told you already and you did not listen; why do you want to hear *it* again? You do not want to become His disciples too, do you?”** (Vs. 26-27)

Now he's getting pretty sarcastic here; he's getting pretty frustrated. But they're asking the same question and he tells him, “*I already told you and you won't listen.*” He's starting to figure out that these Pharisees are not going to listen no matter what, so he gets sarcastic. “Why do I have to tell you again? Do you want to be Jesus' followers?” Well, of course they don't really like that. Verse 28: **They reviled him...** which means they hurl insults at him. They tear him down. Now think about that. These are the religious leaders. This is a blind beggar. This should be the greatest day of his life. He was blind. Now he sees! There should be a party. Instead, he's getting interrogated and, because he won't agree with them, they're beating him up. They're putting him down. They're insulting him.

They reviled him and said, “You are His disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where He is from.” (Vs. 28-29)

So they think maybe the blind man is a follower of Jesus, but they're followers of Moses! And we've seen this before, where Jesus said to them, “*You don't even understand the Law.*” As a matter of fact, Jesus said to them straight up, “*When Moses wrote, he wrote about Me.*” Jesus is the fulfillment of

the Law! But they don't get that, and basically they say, "We're disciples of Moses. We don't even know where this Jesus comes from."

The man answered and said to them, "Well, here is an amazing thing, that you do not know where He is from, and yet He opened my eyes. We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing and does His will, He hears him. Since the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, He could do nothing." (Vs.30-33)

So this is a great argument by the beggar! He says, "Well, that's amazing to me that you don't know where Jesus is from, considering He's healed my eyes. I was blind. Now I see." So it goes through the logic of his argument. "First of all, we know if He was a sinner, God wouldn't hear Him and He couldn't do these miracles. We know that if He is God fearing and doing the will of God, God may empower Him to do miracles. We also know that we've never known an occasion where anyone has ever come along and healed someone who is born blind. We've never seen this before. So if that's all true, it's fairly obvious He has to be from God." This is the blind beggar saying, "I think it's perfectly clear. The emperor has no clothes on." But of course, they don't like that. Verse 34:

They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us?" So they put him out.

So basically, if you can't win the argument, then you attack the character. So they go back to, "You obviously are a big sinner or you wouldn't have been born blind. So who do you think you are, teaching us?" So, "We are those that are the elite. We are those that are fit for office. You know, we're the ones that see the magic clothing. Who are you to teach us?" And they put him out." This was exactly the thing that his parents feared—that they would be put out of the synagogue. This is no small thing. In their culture, this basically creates a barrier with no real chance to get to God. That's why I love verse 35:

Jesus heard that they had put him out, and finding him, (Jesus hears this and goes and finds him. It's like the Good Shepherd finding the lost sheep.) and He said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

So Jesus used His title of Himself again and again in the Gospel of John. "Do you believe in the one who is God in the flesh?" This is basically what he's saying. Verse 36:

He answered, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?"

So this isn't a theologian. This is a beggar that was blind, and now he sees. But he so trusts Jesus, he just needs Jesus to tell him who is it and, "I'll believe in Him."

Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you." (Vs. 37)

So, "**You have seen Him.**" In a court that has significant meaning. He was blind; now he sees. So physically, literally, he's seeing Him. But there's also a spiritual dimension. You are *seeing* the truth. You're becoming spiritually alive. You've seen Him and now you're *hearing* Him. It's very similar to what Jesus says to the woman at the well. "The one who's talking to you, I am He." So He identifies Himself as **the Son of Man**. Verse 38:

And he said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshipped Him.

Very interesting. This is the only time in the Gospel of John where we are told anyone **worshipped** Jesus. So this is the great moment in the story. He clearly understands what Jesus is saying. This is John's word. He believed, **and he worshipped Him**. So just think about this. An hour or two before that, he was put out of the synagogue. The religious leaders put him out, seemingly with no chance to get to God. And in an hour...two hours...he is actually with Jesus and is worshipping God. This is the whole story in a nutshell. The religious leaders cannot get you to God. But he came to Jesus, and Jesus is God. He found God, and he worshipped Him.

And Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind.” (Vs. 39)

So Jesus said His mission *was not to come into the world to judge the world but to seek and to save the lost*. But He told us in John chapter three that when He comes as the Light, the Light will shine into the darkness, and it exposes people's sin—and that does create a judgment. So He's come in order that those who are blind—spiritually blind—would have their eyes opened and see. He's also come that those who think they can see—the self-righteous, the religious crowd—would realize actually they're blind, in order that they might see. Verse 40:

Those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things and said to Him, “We are not blind too, are we?”

So there are some Pharisees hanging around, and basically the construction of the Greek there is they're expecting a negative answer. They're expecting Jesus to say, “Well, not all of you. You probably aren't blind, but some of them are.” So they're expecting something like that. They certainly aren't expecting what they get. Verse 41:

Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.”

What Jesus is saying is, “I wish you were blind, because if you were blind, you would recognize your need for Jesus. And if you recognize your need for Jesus, you would have your sins forgiven. But because you think you can see, you have no need for a Savior because you are self-righteous. Because you think your own good works and religion can save you, you're actually still in your sins because you're so blind.”

Once again, a story ends and you have a very similar pattern where you have, in this case, the blind beggar, or before, the woman caught in adultery, or the woman at the well. Sinners, who encounter Jesus, who realize their need for a Savior, experience forgiveness and new life in Jesus. But it's another story that ends with the self-righteous religious leaders, who are so determined not to believe, that they once again walk away blind to who Jesus is. It's been said, “There are none so blind as those who will not see.” The religious leaders, the Pharisees, they are determined to believe that they are fit for office, that they are the elite, and they are determined that they can see the emperor's clothes. And no matter how obvious it is, they're not going to change their minds. But along comes this blind beggar who once was blind, but now he sees. He's not a theologian. He just knows, “I was blind; now I see.” He is courageously telling them, “Hey, guys, the emperor has no clothes on.” But they simply will not believe.

My experience over the years, many years as a pastor, tells me this story is very accurate. It's most often the people who are sinners—they're misfits, they're losers, they're messed up, they're addicted, they're struggling, they're despairing, they're hopeless, they are a mess—but they're the people that realize they're blind. And Jesus comes along, and they realize they desperately need a Savior. It's the only hope they have. And so they respond to Jesus, and the blind are made to see. How many of us today would give testimony to, "I once was blind, and now I see."? We have encountered God in the flesh—the crucified and risen Savior of the world. But it's the people that think they are so morally good, the people that are so religious, the people that are convinced that if God grades on the curve, "Certainly I'm getting in. If anyone gets in, I'll get in." They have convinced themselves that they're good enough; they just don't need Jesus. Like the Pharisees, if your religion can make you right with God, you don't need a Savior. These are often the most difficult people to reach.

John Newton is the writer of the great old hymn *Amazing Grace*. John Newton has an amazing story. He was a slave trader, and actually did atrocious things to slaves over many, many years, just to make money. But he had an encounter with Jesus, and Jesus changed his life. He experienced the forgiveness of his sins and new life in Christ. It's a remarkable story and, at the end of his story, he was pretty much blind, and famously said, "Although my memory is fading, there are two things I remember clearly. I am a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior." That was the heart behind those amazing lyrics:

*Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me;
I once was lost, but now am found.
I was blind but now I see.*

I pray that will be true for every one of us. Let's pray.

Our Father, we are so thankful that when we were lost in our sin, You sent Jesus to be our Savior. God, there're many listening today that would say, "Like the blind man, I was blind; now I see." But I'm sure there are others who just still don't get it. They're just convinced that through their religion, through their good works, through their morality, somehow they can be good enough. Lord, Jesus said, "They are blind, and because they're blind, they're still in their sins." Lord, open their eyes that they might see and experience the forgiveness that only You can give. In Jesus' name, Amen.

March 28/29, 2020

I Was Blind, Now I See

That You May Believe

John 9:1-41

Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. It was once said, “There is none so blind as those who will not see.” What does that mean? Where do you see this in our culture?
2. The story of the Emperor’s New Clothes is the story about people afraid to state what is obviously true for fear of how others might respond. How do you see this play out in our culture today? How does this play out in religious circles?

Bible Study

1. Read John 9:1-12. Compare John 1:1-5, 5:36-38, 8:12, 58. Why does Jesus use clay and send the man to the pool of Siloam? What is the imagery of this story?
2. Read John 9:13-23. Think again about the statement, “There is none so blind as those who will not see.” How do you see this play out in the religious leaders? What has “blinded” them? How might we see this same “blindness” in religious people today?
3. The blind man’s parents are so fearful of the Pharisees they distance themselves from their own son. How might religious leaders today intimidate people in a similar way? Has that ever happened to you?
4. Read John 9:24-34. The blind man gets progressively bolder with the Pharisees. In verse 25 he states what he knows, he was blind and now he can see. How might this statement help us think about how we might share Christ with religious people who won’t listen?
5. What allows the formerly blind beggar to see so much more clearly than the Pharisees?

