

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Can you imagine being blind? Honestly, I'm not sure that I can. Sure, we can close our eyes, or put on a blindfold. But that's not the same as always having no sight. If you're totally blind, simply getting from point A to point B in an unfamiliar environment is a daunting task. The ability to communicate is hampered. Some estimate that 55% of what we communicate in a conversation is non-verbal. If you can't see that non-verbal part, you're not going to understand nearly as much. If you were blind you would never see a beautiful sunset, you would only be able to listen to TV, you would not be able to drive a car.

If this sounds like a difficult way to have to live, it certainly is. But in our Bible reading today, Jesus talks about something far worse than physical blindness. It's spiritual blindness. When a person is spiritually blind, he doesn't "see" how bad his spiritual condition really is. He doesn't "see" how our sinful thoughts, words and actions are deeply offensive to our holy God. A person who is spiritually blind does not know who the true God is, does not know God's love, does not know God's forgiveness, does not see and cannot follow the one who is the way, the truth and the life... the Lord Jesus Christ.

In this reading we meet a man who was both physically and spiritually blind. We'll see how Jesus helped him. And we'll see some other people who had physical sight, but remained spiritually blind. As we examine this story in more detail, I want you to be thinking and ask yourself, "Am I blind? Or am I partially blind? What are the consequences of my blindness? How will Jesus help me see?"

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

Jesus came across a man who was blind from birth. When the disciples see the man, they have a question. "Who is responsible for this? Who sinned?" If the man had this physical affliction, they reasoned, it must be the result of some sin. Did the man commit a sin in the womb that he should be born this way? Did God anticipate the sin of this man and so afflict him? Did the man's parents do something wrong and God punished them by giving them a son like this?

Let's just say this right away: sometimes earthly afflictions *are* the result of specific sins. Exhibit one: The hangover. The person suffering the hangover is afflicted for a specific sin: drinking too much the night before. But some people feel any and every affliction must be the result of a specific sin. Why did I catch a cold? Must be because I skipped church on last weekend. Why did I get in this car accident? It must be because I refused to help give someone a ride to church. Why did I slip and break my arm? Must be because I got annoyed and refused to help my wife do the dishes when she asked for help the other night. Can we make these associations and draw these conclusions? Jesus reminds us here: no, we really can't.

Now, in a general sense, all afflictions are the result of sin in general. There would be no problems, no pain, no suffering... if the world were perfect. But because Adam and Eve sinned, this world is often an unpleasant place to live, and people suffer. But not always as a consequence to a specific sin.

When asked the question: so who sinned, the man or his parents? Jesus answers: "Neither! It happened that the work of God might be displayed in the man's life. As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me." Jesus is essentially telling his disciples that they're asking the wrong question. Don't ask, "How did this come to be." Rather ask, "What can we do for him?"

Friends, you meet people every day who are suffering and who need help. Jesus teaches us today not to concern ourselves so much with the question, "How did this person get this way?" It's an impersonal question which we ask only because we're looking for an excuse not to help and not to get involved. If we discover what we think could be a reason they brought this suffering upon themselves, we've found our reason *not* to help. This doesn't bring glory to God. Instead we must ask the question, "What can I do for this person? How can I best help him?"

This is the question Jesus asked. By the way, when Jesus thought about how best to help the man, he had more than the man's immediate, physical problem in mind. Jesus was asking the question, "How can I best help this man for all eternity?" The man was physically blind, but as we see later in the reading, he was also spiritually blind. He did not know Jesus as the Christ, the promised Savior from all sin. In this case, Jesus knew that giving him physical sight would also open the door to give him spiritual sight. But we're getting ahead of ourselves:

Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam." So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

We don't know why Jesus chose this way of healing the man. But it certainly did require a level of obedience and submission. It reminds me of the Naaman who went to Elisha for healing. When he was told to wash in the Jordan River, Naaman was insulted and was going to go home. But another convinced him to submit to the word of the prophet and do this simple thing. He did and was healed... as was the blind man. The first step to receiving spiritual sight is listening fully to the Word of Christ. And this is what Jesus was teaching the man in the way he healed him.

John 9:13-17 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath.

The Sabbath day was a day of rest. There were very strict rules about working. Believe it or not, that Jesus made mud, put it on the man's eyes and healed him was considered work. That Jesus worked on the Sabbath day has the Pharisees up in arms.

Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see." Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others asked, "How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?" So they were divided.

Do you see their dilemma? On the one hand they believed: "All people who are from God keep the Sabbath." They discovered that this man, Jesus, did not keep the Sabbath. Therefore, obviously this man is not from God.

But there was a second dilemma. Only people who are from God can open the eyes of someone born blind. Jesus did in fact open the eyes of this blind man. Therefore Jesus must be from God.

So they were divided and arguing, some saying he must be from God, others saying he can't be from God. So finally they turn to the blind man again. Maybe he can guide them along this dark path! (Oh, the irony!)

“What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” The man replied, “He is a prophet.”

Maybe we weren't clear about this before, but understand this: The man who was healed was *not* a believer in Jesus. He didn't even *know* Jesus! But through all of this, he is coming to know Jesus. He sides with the minority of the Pharisees who are concluding that Jesus must be from God. Now what follows next, we didn't hear in our earlier reading, but it's fascinating how this plays out, and gives us great insight into the stubborn blindness of the Pharisees. Listen to the story:

John 9:18-34 The Jews still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. “Is this your son?” they asked. “Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?” “We know he is our son,” the parents answered, “and we know he was born blind. But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself.” His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for already the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue. That was why his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.” A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. “Give glory to God,” they said. “We know this man is a sinner.” He replied, “Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!” Then they asked him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” He answered, “I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?” Then they hurled insults at him and said, “You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from.” The man answered, “Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man 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.” To this they replied, “You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!” And they threw him out.

Understand that this man still does not fully know Jesus. So he simply stands by the account of what really happened to him, and is making some logical conclusions. The Pharisees are so blind in their hatred of Jesus that they can't look at the matter logically. Even in the face of an obvious miracle from God, the Pharisees remain firm in their conviction that Jesus is a liar, a blasphemer and fraud. The man is cast out of the Synagogue... he's no longer allowed to go there for worship and instruction in the word of God. But don't worry... Jesus wouldn't leave him like this. Listen:

Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” “Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him.” Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.” Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him. Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.”

Did you catch the miracle in those verses I just read? A blind man was just given sight! You see, the blind man was first given physical sight, but remained spiritually blind. He still didn't know that Jesus is the promised Savior. He was figuring out that Jesus is special... and that Jesus is a prophet of God. But he still didn't know Jesus is God's own Son and the Savior of the world. So Jesus gives him now *spiritual* sight! He opens the eyes of faith so he can see clearly that the one

before him is the one who fixes his broken relationship with God. The man falls down before Jesus and worships him as true God and as his Savior.

At the same time the Pharisees are confirmed in their blindness. They reject Jesus the light of the world, and so they remain in darkness.

As we wrap this up today, there are two things I'd like you to take home to ponder further. 1) Jesus gives you spiritual sight. And 2) you are God's instrument to bring spiritual sight to the blind that are all around you.

1) Jesus gives you spiritual sight. When that man found out that Jesus was the promised Messiah, true God, and his personal Savior from sin and the one who grants eternal life, he fell to his knees. In awe and amazement, in thankfulness and praise, he could do only one think: Worship Jesus. Sometime in a spiritual blindness, we start to think the world is light for our darkness. We'll find light and life and purpose through buying new and shiny stuff, by living for self, by focusing on the here and now, by indulging our sinful nature. We focus on the eternal for one hour a week and on the material for the other 167 hours of the week.

But today, would you stop, open your eyes and look at Jesus. Because he's opening your blind eyes to amazing truth that impacts you 24 x 7. He defeats you're the enemies of your soul. He is your substitute who lives for you and dies for, giving you a perfect record before God. He removes the guilt of your sin completely. He makes you an adopted child of almighty God. He paid your way into heaven for eternity.

How can you respond but to fall on your knees before Jesus and worship him! Your eyes are opened and you see beyond the physical and material to things that last forever. And Jesus is the gifter. Praise and worship him, for he has healed your blindness and opened your eyes to blessings unimaginable!

2) The second thing to take home and ponder further is this. What if you had a friend, neighbor or family member who was blind... and you knew a way to restore their sight? Would you hesitate to help them... even for a second? I know you know people who suffer from a blindness that has eternal consequences. They are blind to the word and works of God. They are blind to his will and ways. They are blind to his love and forgiveness in Christ Jesus. Do you see the horrible tragedy in this? You have in your possession that which gives sight to the blind. Will you find a way *this week* to be God's instrument in opening the eyes of the blind people around you. At the very least, would you do this simple thing: invite someone to come to church with you so that they can meet the one who restores sight to the blind?

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

All praise be to our Lord Jesus Christ! Amen.

(Hymn 577)