

To See or Not To See

John 8:12-20 & 9:1-41

Introduction

I have read that, in the United States, someone goes blind every twenty minutes.

My godly mother-in-law is legally blind, as a result of worsening diabetes. My wife and I had lunch with friends, recently, among whom was a woman who is also legally blind – a condition from birth. There is a gentleman in our church who is undergoing extensive testing because of the ever impending threat of total blindness.

If you and I were told by God to choose a physical disability, I am sure that not one of us would choose blindness. Yet, in the passage we will study today, we are about to discover a blindness far worse than the loss of physical sight. We are about to take a journey back to group of people who will choose to remain spiritually blind; and yet, also observe the wonderful story of a man, blind from birth, who chooses to see.

I invite you to turn to the gospel by John and, as you are turning in your Bible, let me set the stage.

You may remember that the setting of John, chapter 7, is the Festival of Tabernacles or Booths. One of the predominate aspects of that festival was water. You remember how the high priest went down to the pool of Siloam and dipped the basin into the water. Then, he returned, carrying the basin of water, while the crowd chanted from Isaiah, chapter 12, verse 3,

... you will joyously draw water from the springs of salvation.

He then, poured the water over the rock of the altar, signifying the water that flowed from the rock in

the wilderness that allowed the Israelites to drink. At that moment, according to John, chapter 7, verses 37 and 38,

... Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, ... 'From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.'"

The waters of Siloam provided an excellent background for Jesus' Messianic invitation.

But, there was a second, and equally important, aspect of this festival. It was a ceremony called the, "Illumination of the Temple". It took place in the treasury, also known as the Court of Women. The court was surrounded with deep galleries, built to hold hundreds of spectators. In the center of that massive courtyard were four great candelabra. On the first evening of the Festival of Booths, these four gigantic candelabra were lit and, it was said, they sent such a blaze of light throughout Jerusalem that every courtyard was lit up with their brilliance.

These candelabra played the role of stage prop, in this festival play, to remind the Israelites of the pillar of fire that led their forefathers through the wilderness.

One more point, as I set up this scene for you. In our discussion of the first part of John, chapter 8, we studied the final day of this festival. Now, you need to know that, in this passage, the Feast of Booths had ended. Just the day before, in the treasury, these great candelabras had blazed forth their incredible light, but now they were dark, the flames have been extinguished.

Now notice, chapter 8, verse 12.

Again therefore Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life."

Now, if this were a stage, you could not help but notice the props in the background. Skip to verse 20.

These words He spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple . . .

In other words, Jesus is seated in the same courtyard where these candelabra are located. These darkened, silent reminders stood there, as if to declare that the light in the temple was a brilliant light, but, in the end, it flickers and dies. But Jesus is saying, "I am the light which lasts forever!"

Back in verse 12, there is hidden a challenge that is easy to overlook.

. . . I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in darkness . . .

The challenge is found in the invitation to follow.

Greek Uses of the Word "Follow"

The word "follow," or "akoloutheo," was used in a number of different ways by Greek writers. For instance:

A soldier following his captain

1. A soldier following his captain.

On the long marches into battle, in campaigns in strange lands, the soldier followed wherever the captain lead. The Christian who walks in the light will be the one who, as a good soldier, follows the commander, who is Christ.

A slave following his master

2. A slave following his master.

Wherever the master goes, the slave is in attendance – always ready to spring into action and perform a duty or task. He is at his master's beck and call. The Christian who follows Jesus is one who serves his Master Lord.

Someone following or accepting a wise person's counsel

3. Someone following or accepting a wise person's counsel.

Just as Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates had their followers, who followed their counsel, one of the titles of our Savior is, "Wonderful Counselor". So, the believer who follows the counsel of the Lord will walk in the light!

Look again at verse 12 and notice the first part of the words that Jesus spoke.

Again therefore Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life."

What did He mean by, "I am the light of the world . . ."?

Last winter, I stored some firewood in our backyard. A gentlemen in the church came and got my pickup truck and loaded it with firewood. He brought over a bunch of white oak. First, we laid a couple of two by fours down to serve as a foundation to keep the firewood dry. Then, we stacked the wood on top.

The following spring, I was cleaning outside and happened to pull those two by fours up. Immediately, there was a mass of movement. There were zillions of little bugs, and some big bugs as well, scurrying and rushing about, searching for the shadows. They had been exposed by the light of day.

That is as simple and yet, as profound as Jesus' own comments! That is what happened when Jesus came and kicked over the board called legalistic, Pharisaic Judaism. The Pharisees and Scribes could not stand the light and they hated Jesus for disturbing their darkness.

People today do not like Him. He disturbs their darkness.

Now, can you guess what happened in the same spot, a few weeks later, in my backyard? Little green shoots began to appear, as the earth, warmed by the light, began to experience life!

So, when Jesus says, "I am the light of the world . . .", He is indicating that two things are going to happen:

- people who love the darkness are going to scurry for cover – they choose the shadows; they choose to walk in the dark, while
- other people will come to life – they choose the light.

Now, I want to leave chapter 8, and its declaration, and move into chapter 9 for the practical demonstration!

Arthur Pink writes,

In John 8 we behold Christ as the light exposing the darkness, but in John 9 He communicates sight. In John 8 the Light is despised and rejected; in John 9 He is received and worshipped. In John 8 the Jews are seen stooping down to pick up stones; in John 9 Christ is seen stooping down to make anointing clay. In John 8 Christ hides Himself from the Jews; in John 9 He reveals Himself to the blind beggar.

Turn to John, chapter 9, verses 1 and 2.

And as He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?"

These disciples were simply echoing the popular interpretation of their day, "Someone sinned". If there is sickness, there is sin.

Not true!

The Purposes of Sickness

Jesus makes it very clear that sickness can be for many purposes.

For the purpose of exaltation.

1. Sickness may be for the purpose of exaltation.

That is the point in this passage. Look at verse 3.

Jesus answered, "It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was in order that the works of God might be displayed in him."

Jesus knew a miracle was about to take place! The disciples did not!

For the purpose of instruction.

2. Sickness may also be for the purpose of instruction.

In fact, I rarely visit someone in the hospital without encouraging them to consider that their hospital room is also a classroom and the teacher is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do not forget that God may use our experience to help, instruct, and encourage others who pass through the same trials.

For the purpose of correction.

3. Sickness may come for the purpose of correction.

I never get the flu or have a physical sickness without asking the Lord, "Is there something You are trying to teach me concerning an error or sin in my life?"

God may use our suffering to break through the hardness of another person and bring about change in them.

For the purpose of salvation.

4. God may use suffering for the purpose of salvation.

He may use suffering in the life of a person to bring that same person to His side.

One illustration of this is that, this morning, in the neurological wing of our local hospital, is a brand new Christian named Gene. A few months ago, he was in the wrong place at the wrong time and was shot in the back. He is now paralyzed from the chest down. I visited Gene a few times and finally, laying flat on his back, holding my hand, he prayed to receive Christ as his Savior. By the way, he told me, "As soon as I get out, I'm coming to your church."

Suffering may be for the purpose of salvation!

Now notice chapter 9, verse 5.

While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

Do you recognize that metaphor? This is the key linking verse between what He said in chapter 8 and what He will do in chapter 9.

Continue to verses 6 and 7.

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). And so he went away and washed, and came back seeing.

Why go wash in the pool of Siloam? Why not just speak the words? Remember, Jesus never healed

anyone just because they were sick. No, He healed to prove a point. And what an unmistakable point!

You need to understand Christ's strange command within the context of the Festival of Booths. Siloam was, you will recall, the place where the priest dipped the water that signified God's spiritual and physical supply for His people. Jesus stood and said, "If you're thirsty, come drink of Me . . . I'll never run out."

And now, follow this carefully, Christ sends the man to the pool of Siloam. And, in this one miracle, the themes of water and light are combined as a sign to Israel.

Here is the blind beggar, groping for the water's edge. He kneels and obeys the words of Christ, and applies the water to his sightless eyes. Slowly, he lifts his head, water dripping from his face. He opens his eyes and a flood of strange light comes in. He blinks away the watery mist and finally, the light begins to clarify objects, faces, reflections. He rises to his feet, as curious onlookers marvel at what they have just witnessed – this man can see!

Here is the point – if Israel, the blind beggar, will obey the words of Christ and come to Him, the Living Water, they also will be able to see the light!

The Pharisees Will Respond With a Two-Pronged Approach

Now the rest of the chapter records the response – primarily from the Pharisees. The Pharisees will respond with a two-pronged approach.

Cross-examination

1. One approach is cross-examination. This will take place from verse 13 to verse 34.

Look at verses 13 through 16.

They brought to the Pharisees him who was formerly blind. Now it was a Sabbath on the day when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes. Again, therefore, the Pharisees also were asking him how 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.

Here is what had really "rattled their cages" – Jesus had performed a miracle, BUT He had performed it on the day of rest.

You need to understand the Laws of the Sabbath. It was against the law to carry a burden. The rabbis had developed that to include:

- carrying a handkerchief from one room to another,
- lighting a lamp,
- cutting your fingernails,
- plucking your beard, and, get this,
- performing medicine.

According to rabbinical maxims, it was all right to practice medicine if life was in danger, but it was forbidden to do anything to improve life. In fact, a doctor could not treat a toothache, nor pour water on a sprained ankle. This blind man's life was not threatened and yet, Jesus performed medicine on him.

So, they are in a real fix. They believed, in that day, that causing a blind person to see was the undeniable proof of the Messiah. Why? Because there was not even one record in all of the Old Testament of that miracle taking place.

So, they try a different approach – "Let's discredit the witness."

Look at verses 18 through 21.

The Jews therefore 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 they questioned them, saying, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? Then how does he now see?"

Now, this is so sad.

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 shall speak for himself."

Why didn't they back their son up?! Why didn't they just say, "Phooey," on the Pharisees?!

The next verse tells us, verse 22.

His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews . . .

(the leaders)

. . . had already agreed, that if anyone should confess Him to be Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue.

Excommunication

2. This gives us the second prong of their approach – excommunication.

There were two kinds of excommunication:

- there was a temporary excommunication, for the sake of discipline, that might last a month or more, and
- there was a permanent excommunication, where the individual was banished from the synagogue for life.

This was a powerful weapon. Why? Because the synagogue was the controller of everything in the life of the Jew – social, civic, athletic, political, and, of course, religious.

Later, in John, chapter 12, verse 42, we read,

Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue

To be cut off from the synagogue would be the equivalent of being cut off from life. And the ultimate terror was that you were considered not only shut out from the synagogue, but from God.

What a wonderful word of encouragement this healing is to the tiny communities of Jewish Christians scattered throughout the Roman empire. They were being cast out of the synagogues and ostracized, by their fellow Jews, as traitors. It still happens today.

I had the privilege of knowing and hearing Dr. Jacob Gartenhaus, a converted Jew, in New York, who spent his life trying to win his people to the true Messiah. His biography is entitled, *Traitor*.

One incident that I remember from his testimony, told of how, as a young man, he trusted Christ as his Savior. Immediately, he cried, “I have found the Messiah!”

He then shared it with two other Jews and, within minutes, he was surrounded by a crowd of Jews who began to beat him. He was beaten twice and stoned.

It can be a frightening thing to be rejected, scorned, unwanted.

It does not seem to be intimidating this beggar into changing his story, however. So, the Pharisees try a final time. Notice verse 24.

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

This is a legal phrase that meant, “Tell the truth.”

“. . . we know that this man is a sinner.”

In other words, “He couldn’t have done this to you!”

Now look at verse 25 for the beggar’s answer.

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

The Pharisees really just wanted to disqualify Jesus. They avoided the truth in their quest for a loophole.

Occasionally we will meet people who only want to argue and debate the merits and claims of Jesus, without ever deciding to follow him. They mask their rejection under a thin cover of inquiry. It is easier to keep the argument on intellectual grounds than to face spiritual and moral need.

Did you miss that powerful testimony, in verse 25? “I don’t know much and I don’t understand what all the argument is about; all I know is, this morning, I couldn’t see, and this afternoon, I can.”

No council of Pharisees, however powerful, can change that!

What a great encouragement it would be to all of us in our own testimony. There you are, standing before a philosophy professor, a fellow scientist, a religious skeptic, and the argument they cannot answer is your testimony, “I was blind, but now I see!”

Continue to verses 26 and 27a.

They said therefore to him, “What did He do to you? 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?”

Now notice his penetrating question, in verse 27b.

“You do not want to become His disciples too, do you?”

In other words, he asks them, “Do you want to be able to see too?”

The truth is, they were prejudiced already against Jesus, and, as a result, they could not accept Him and they could not rejoice over this blind beggar who could now see!

Tony Campolo told the story of a man who took his advice. It backfired on him, but, at any rate, Campolo was challenging him to love his wife in language she could understand. He later retold this story of what happened,

I usually leave the factory sweating and dirty at the end of the day, but I decided that, if I really wanted to do something special for my wife, I would clean up before I saw her that afternoon. So I showered and shaved in the factory locker room and I even had brought a fresh change of clothes. On the way home, I stopped at a florist and bought some flowers for her. I usually come in the back door of the house, grab a snack from the frig and go watch TV until supper. But, because I wanted to do something special, I went to the front door, rang the doorbell and waited for my wife to answer the door. When she opened the door, I held out the flowers and said, “I love you!”

She looked at the flowers, then at me, and then burst into tears. She said, “I’ve had a terrible day. Billy broke his leg and I had to take him to the hospital. I no sooner got him home from the hospital than the phone rang. It was your mother. She’s coming to visit for two weeks. I tried to do the wash, and the washing machine broke. There’s water all over the basement floor. And now . . . and now you come home drunk!”

Like this woman, the Pharisees have a cause for celebration, but they had already jumped to the wrong conclusion!

Think about it. Here is a beggar that everyone knew. He has been blind from birth and now, he can see! And what do they say? “Did He do that to you on the Sabbath?”

Forget the miracle – let’s focus on the minutia of rabbinical law.

The last phrase of verse 34 says it all.

And they put him out.

He was placed under the ban; excommunicated from the synagogue.

I love what happens next, in verses 35 through 38.

Jesus heard that they had put him out; and finding him, He said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man? He answered and said, “And who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?” Jesus said to him, “You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you.” And he said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped Him.

A beggar, dressed in rags, hurt and rejected by those who should have thrown a week long celebration – his parents, but for fear of their reputation, abandon him in court. Jesus comes, finds him, and embraces him.

Imagine being told you cannot worship in the synagogue, and God makes Himself available for a personal worship service. I am sure it carried that man through the difficult, ostracizing days ahead.

David wrote, in Psalm, chapter 27, verse 10,

For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will take me up.

G. Campbell Morgan was one of the best known Bible teachers of his generation. In 1888, he, along with one hundred fifty other young men, sought entrance into the Wesleyan ministry. He had passed his written, theological examination, but still faced the test of giving a trial sermon in front of a panel. When the results were released, Morgan’s name was among the men who were refused. He sent a telegram to his father with one word, “Rejected.”

Then he sat down and wrote in his journal, “It is very dark, everything seems so still . . .”.

His father replied as quickly as he could, and the telegram read, “Rejected on earth, accepted in heaven.”

Here is a man:

- rejected by man, but accepted by God, and
- excommunicated from the house of worship, but finding true worship.

He could see physically and spiritually. The Pharisees chose to remain blind – they could see physically, but not spiritually.

“To see or not to see,” that really is the question. What is your answer today?

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