

John 9

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[0 : 00] Please open your Bibles to John chapter 9. We're going to look at the whole chapter tonight. John chapter 9. If you've not got a church Bible, they're just on the table as you come in.

When I went to summer camps as a young teenager, in the evening of those camps, we would sometimes play wide games on the big sports field in the dark, in pitch black.

Everyone before the camp was told to bring a torch so that they could join in in the night time games. It was great fun. If somebody had been watching from far or you were able to put a drone up in the sky, it would have looked like a large dark space with little specks of light.

Kids running around trying to spot each other or capture a flag or whatever the game was that evening. The torches made the game possible. They brought light to a place which was otherwise dark.

On those evenings, the torch was your friend. But on the very same camp, I've got vivid memories of being woken up in the morning by a camp leader coming into the room and shining his torch into my eyes.

[1 : 23] Switching the ceiling lights on. I hated it. It was a rude way to wake up. At one moment you're asleep. The next moment someone is shining a great big light in your eyes.

And your first instinct when someone does that is to what? It's to turn your face away, isn't it? Put your head in your pillow. Pull the top of the sleeping bag up over your face.

On those mornings, the light was definitely not your friend. And I tell those two little anecdotes to illustrate the way that it is with light.

Sometimes light is wonderful. Sometimes light can enable people to see. Something that they wouldn't have been able to see without it.

But sometimes the light is blinding. Sometimes you want to turn away and run from the light.

Sometimes light is not wonderful at all. When the light shines, one of those two things happens.

[2 : 28] People can see or people are made blind. And that's what John 9 is all about. John 9 shows us that is what it is like with Jesus.

Jesus, the light of the world. And so chapter 9 is about Jesus and the blind man and the blind men. The chapter begins with the disciples' confusion.

Can you see it in verse 1? They say, As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, Rabbi, which means teacher, who sinned? This man or his parents?

And the disciples assumed, don't they, there's got to be a link with this man's blindness and some sin that he or his parents have committed.

The theological position is really this. It's that God punishes sins with things like disability. It's a theological position that Jesus rejects, and for good reasons.

[3 : 36] Now, in general terms, we know that the Bible establishes, doesn't it, a very clear connection between suffering and sin. Sin has consequences. And in God's justice, sin leads to punishment.

But at many points, the Bible resists the kind of connection that the disciples are making in verse 1. It was the same kind of connection, wasn't it, that Job's friends, do you remember them?

In the book of Job. That when an individual suffers, it can only be that that individual or someone close to them has done something to deserve it. And the Bible says no to that.

That is not the only explanation when you suffer. Sometimes suffering is indiscriminate. Sometimes the righteous suffer. Suffering does not just come to those who deserve it.

And so in John 9, Jesus is really emphatic. God did not allow the suffering into this man's life because of some sin that he or his family had committed.

[4 : 38] He allowed this disability into his life for a different purpose altogether. Can you see it in verse 3? There's the purpose. So that the works of God might be displayed. In fact, that is precisely what we're about to see.

In verse 4, Jesus makes it very clear that the works of God are going to be done in this man's life. They're going to be done by him. It's another, isn't it, very strong claim from Jesus to be equal with God.

Who does God's work in the world? Jesus says, I do. And he adds, we must work while it is still day before the night comes. And then he makes this staggering claim.

It's not a new claim. He's already said it before, but he reiterates it here at a very deliberate moment. He says, as long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

He's claiming to be the one who shines God's salvation light upon the world. He is the one who reveals God's glory, who leads God's people, who shows them the way.

[5 : 43] He's the one, he says, who holds the answer to the world's darkness. The darkness of sin and death. It's a very big claim. And what we see here is that Jesus immediately takes steps to validate that claim.

His staggering words about himself are instantly followed by a staggering sign. He meets a man born blind. And then he spits on the ground to make some mud.

And then he rubs the mud in the man's eyes. And he tells him, go and wash it off in the pool of Siloam. And when the man does that, does what Jesus says, the man begins to see.

He'd been blind from birth his whole life up to this point. His whole life had been filled with darkness. But as that man walked home from the pool of Siloam, for the first time in his life, this man saw where he was placing his feet.

He saw green leaves on the tree. He saw the distant horizon. He saw the looks on people's face.

[6 : 57] He saw it all. He saw everything. He must have been reeling with surprise and gratitude and happiness. And what is more, he wasn't just seeing people for the first time.

The people were seeing him and coming to terms with it. The public's reaction is varied. His neighbours see him walking around and think, he looks like the one who used to sit by the road begging.

Do you remember him? Some thought it was him. Others couldn't believe their eyes and they were convinced it must be someone else. He must have a twin or something. It must be someone that looked like him.

But the blind man says, no, it's really me. And he tells them what happened. All that Jesus has said and done to heal him.

And the people wanted to see this Jesus who'd done this. But the formerly blind man didn't know where Jesus was. So the people take him to the Pharisees to get their verdict on what's just happened in this most astonishing event.

[8 : 03] Look at verse 13. And they brought to the Pharisees the man who'd formerly been blind. Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes.

So the Pharisees again asked him how he'd received his sight. And he said to them, he put mud on my eyes and I washed and I see. Some of the Pharisees said, this man is not from God for he does not keep the Sabbath.

You notice, and I think it's really interesting that up to this point, John hasn't told us when this miracle took place. He hadn't told us that it took place on the Sabbath and that is because it wasn't relevant until now.

The day on which this occurred was only important to the Pharisees. and they are outraged because of what Jesus has done by healing this man on that day. I hope you never get used to the fact that they are more concerned with their distorted interpretation of God's law than they are with the man's new sight.

It's tragic, isn't it, to say the least. And because they are obsessed with the Sabbath rule, they are unable to see past this to who Jesus must be.

[9 : 18] Some of them think that obedience to their rules is a better indication of divine origin than a display of power. There are others who are not so sure.

They think this power suggests that he must come from God. So verse 16 tells us, can you see that? They were divided because of Jesus. Well, we've seen that before. So again, they ask the blind man what he thinks.

And he says that he thinks Jesus must be a prophet. The Pharisees, they display their stubborn characteristic, stubbornness.

Once more, verse 18, they say, the Jews did not believe that he'd been born blind and he'd received sight. So they call for his mom and dad.

And they ask mom and dad to explain what's happened. And the parents are very nervous. Can you pick that up? And they confirm, this is our son who was born blind and they confirm that he can now see.

[10:25] They admit that, but they hedge their bets when it comes to explaining how it happened. They simply tell the Pharisees, well, let him speak for himself.

Verse 22, his parents said these things because they feared the Jews for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be the Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue. That's why his parents said, well, he's of age, ask him.

Talk about having your mind made up. The Jews, it seems, were so stubborn in their unwillingness to hear Jesus that they've already decided to persecute, to exclude anyone who accepted Jesus as the Messiah.

And they make their decision known. So resolute was their opposition to Jesus that people are already living in fear of coming to a conclusion about Jesus, which would be unpopular with the Pharisees.

Well, having been sidestepped by the parents, the Pharisees called the man back for even more questions. Amazingly, in verse 24, they equate giving glory to God with admitting that Jesus is evil. The irony of verse 24 is too thick for words.

[11:38] The very opposite is the truth. By their refusal to acknowledge Jesus for who he really was, they are the ones that are refusing to give God glory.

And the blind man's response cuts right to the heart of the matter. It's almost certainly the high point of the chapter. Listen again to the simplicity with which he speaks. He replied, whether he is a sinner, I do not know.

One thing I do know, that though I was blind, I now see. this is what he is saying, he is saying, you can take your theological jargon and your animosity to Jesus and you can shove it.

what I know is this, I used to be blind, but now I see. Don't you see what's happened here?

I don't know anyone else, he says, who's got the power to do this. No one in my whole life has been able to help me until I met this guy. You're missing the obvious. This guy has the power to give sight to the blind.

[12:47] I can see, I can see. The tragedy is that they can't. He used to be a blind man and now they are the blind man.

Verse 26, we discover that they haven't changed their tune at all. They asked him, what did he do? How did he open your eyes?

He answered, I've told you already and you didn't listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciple? You can hear his exasperation with these Pharisees growing. Now he's gone and done it. He may have just pushed them over the edge. He's caused the greatest offence that he could have possibly caused. It's as if the blind man, the former blind man is saying, secretly, you like him, don't you?

There's no other explanation for your obsession with him. You love him. You want to follow him, don't you? And he's toying with them now.

[13:54] You've got to love this man. And so the Pharisees' outrage becomes the Pharisees' fury and they turn on the healed man and they revile him saying, verse 28, you are his disciples but we are the disciples of Moses.

We know that God has spoken to Moses but as for this man we don't know where he comes from. It's fascinating, isn't it? Who do they choose to identify with? Moses.

They don't say God. Tellingly, they choose to line up behind the one who has given them the law. But their fury only exasperates the healed man further and he's not going to take it lying down.

Verse 30, why this is an amazing thing. You do not know where he comes from and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners but if anyone is a worshipper of God and does his will God listens to him.

Never since the world begun has it been feared that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God he could do nothing. That's a pretty penetrating expose of the

Pharisees' blindness.

[15:08] but blind to the bitter end the Pharisees of the last word. Verse 34, you were born in utter sin. You were born in utter sin and you would teach us.

How dare you lecture us. They throw him out. In actual fact they don't have the last words do they? Not as far as the apostle John is concerned.

The last word in the chapter belongs to Jesus himself. And Jesus re-enters the narrative in verse 37 where he seeks out the man that he'd healed and he asks him if he believes in the son of man. It's Jesus' most common way of referring to himself. It's from Daniel chapter 7. the man responds by saying that he wants to believe in the son of man if only he knew who he was.

Listen to what Jesus says. Verse 37, you have seen him and it is he who is speaking to you.

[16:17] I hope you didn't miss the most significant of all the words in verse 37. Just look down. Can you spot the most significant word? What's the most significant word there?

Seen. Seen. I suspect the healed man didn't miss the significance of that.

Jesus said to him, you are looking at him. Up until a few hours ago this man couldn't look at anyone or anything but now he's looking at the son of man.

Up until a few hours ago this man had never seen anything in his entire life and now he is seeing the Christ, God's king. man. And John to prove that this man can see not only physically but spiritually tells us what he did next.

And what he did next tells you and I emphatically and beyond doubt that this man could really see who Jesus was. Verse 38, then the man said Lord I believe and he worshipped him.

[17:39] The two indispensables tonight, faith and worship. Faith and worship, they are all that Jesus requires and they are all that Jesus deserves and he deserves them because they are what God himself deserves, faith and worship.

And this guy gets it, he sees it. And so he bows down in reverence and awe and humble gratitude and so do all people who see Jesus properly.

He worships Jesus. Then Jesus makes it very explicit, he speaks of his authority to judge, he reveals what it means for him to be the light of the world.

He says some will see and some will be blinded. Verse 39, for judgment, I came into this world, that those who do not see may see and those who see may become blind.

Before Jesus is a blind man who now sees. man who see and that man has just come from a group of men who think that they can see but they're spiritually blind.

[18:58] The Pharisees have got a lot to say about Jesus in this chapter but all of it has been wrong. And thus they've confirmed their darkness.

They've confirmed the darkness that has engulfed their minds. Some Pharisees in verse 40 sense that Jesus might be talking about them. So they ask, do you think we're blind? And Jesus' spine tingling reply comes in verse 41.

Jesus said, if you were blind you'd have no guilt but now that you see we see your guilt remains. And what I think Jesus is saying there is if they really were incapable of spiritual insight for some reason then their blindness would come without guilt.

But that's not the situation. They are not incapable of spiritual sight. They are just stubborn in their rejection aren't they? They are hard hearted and so they are guilty.

That's what Jesus says. And so these words from Jesus' lips should have been frightening for them. They were in danger of dying in their sins as we've heard.

[20:07] They were in danger of God's wrath remaining upon them. They refused to come to Jesus to have life. So they were in great danger of that same Jesus pronouncing the sentence of death upon them.

John 9 is a very vivid explanation of what is going on throughout Jesus' ministry. Jesus is the light of the world and when the light shines some are blinded by it but others see.

some are like what I was like on that camp when the leader flicked his torch into my eyes and put the ceiling light on.

They turn away from the light. They refuse to see the light but others are like those delighted young boys running around with abandon and confidence in the middle of a dark field because they've got a torch light to see by and the light is their friend.

some are blinded by the light others see by it. And in particular here it's the Pharisees who are blind.

[21 : 20] It's been a significant theme throughout John's Gospel. In their blindness they oppose Jesus and they oppose others who follow Jesus and they look to attack Jesus.

They're angry with Jesus. They want to kill Jesus. All these things are you can see from a very surface reading of John's Gospel. But Jesus offers a diagnosis of the Pharisees blindness that goes beneath the surface.

Do you remember in John 8 Jesus tells us that they are destined to die in their sins. Jesus tells us that they are slaves to sin, that they're children of the devil himself and their blindness places them in a desperate situation before God.

and even more desperate is that they are oblivious to it. These people, they think they're fine with God, they think that they're alright and Jesus is a heretic.

They think that all is well for them spiritually but Jesus says they're in serious trouble and they can't see it. And of course that's what blindness is and that is what blindness is today too.

[22 : 32] It is thinking we're okay spiritually when really you're in big trouble. It is believing that you're fine with God when in fact you're not fine with God at all.

It is being willing to dismiss Jesus as wrong or more likely unimportant when in the end he will be the one who could dismiss you.

And we are surrounded by this. You are surrounded by it when you go to work and when you go to school and you are surrounded by it when you spend time with your friends and some of us are surrounded by it in our families and if you went into Ealing tonight and you went to the pub you'd be surrounded by that too.

This city is full of people who are spiritually blind. people who have dismissed Jesus and think that they have no spiritual problem.

Who believe that things are fine between them and God and yet the truth is things are not fine between them and God. And Jesus pulls no punches does he? He says that they are destined to die in their sins God's wrath remains on them they are children of the devil they are in the darkness and on the light.

[23 : 54] So this chapter reminds you and I of a great reality about the world in which we live. And it reminds us about a truth that ought to grieve us and rest heavily upon us.

That Jesus is the world's light and yet so many around us are blind and in tragic danger. And so should we not live rightly before their eyes that they might see the difference?

Should we not explain our hope to them whenever we're given an opportunity and should we not above all pray for them. And pray earnestly for them because only God can open their eyes.

Only God can turn hard hearts into soft hearts. Only God can deliver people from spiritual blindness. In the end our ministries can't do it.

Can they little stars can't do it. Language class can't do it. Bible studies can't do it. Club 16 Ignite can't do it. Courses can't do it. Getting better publicity and a cracking website can't do it.

[25 : 05] But God can. God wonderfully uses those things. But at the end of the day our family and our friends, our colleagues and our neighbours, they need a miracle.

They need the God of all the universe to send his spirit to open blind eyes. And they need us to plead with God to do that. To give them sight in the place of blindness.

And so this chapter is a reminder to you and I of the burden to pray for the blind. And I hope it reminds you of that burden too. And I continue to hope and pray that God would make great distress for the spiritually blind in Mark of IPC.

that an earnest prayerfulness for the lost would be one of the things that defines us as a church.

And this chapter reminds us, doesn't it, of how important that is, but the chapter, as I finish, reminds us of something else as well.

Something that comes to you and I tonight, not as a burden at all, but as a great delight. because the chapter reminds me that I am like this healed man.

[26 : 29] Because by his mercy, God has granted me this miracle that they really need if they are to see, and I can tonight.

I can see that Jesus really is who he says he is. I can see that Jesus deserves to be worshipped. I can see that he has the power to perform great miracles. Because he really has come from God, and he really is equal with God, and greater by far than being able to see the steps that I take, or the green leaves on the trees, or the far horizons, or the looks on people's faces, greater by far is the ability to see Jesus for who he really is.

And having come to see him properly, I would rather, honestly, be physically blind than to lose this sight, wouldn't you?

this is the 2020 vision that really matters. I can see. It's not because I'm smarter or more intuitive than anyone else, it is because Jesus, the light of the world, has opened my eyes.

[27 : 50] And if you tonight, like me, can see Jesus clearly, if you, like me, know that he is worthy of our faith, and worthy of our worship, and if you, like me, would rather see him than anything else, it is only because God has been merciful to you.

Jesus, the light of the world, has opened your eyes. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me.

I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind, but now I see. With incredible gratitude, we are like a crowd of boys running around on a sports field, surrendered to the sheer pleasure of being able to see, because of the light that is in our hands, and not only in our hands, but in our hearts, with humble awe, we are like that man, I trust, that man who fell at Jesus' feet and worshipped, and we, like him, can say tonight, can't we, look, there are many things, many things in this life I don't understand, and there is lots about God and his ways that I still don't know, but there's one thing I do know, I was blind, but now I see, let's pray.