

Worship Series: *Our Greatest Needs*
Service Theme: *Sight for the Blind*

Sermon Theme: *An Eyewitness Account from a Man Born Blind*
(March 19, 2023) John 9:1-7, 13-17, 34-39

Darkness. That's all I'd ever known. I'd never seen the vibrant colors of a beautiful sunrise, or the flickering light of a lamp, or twinkling stars high in the night sky. My life was total darkness. Because I was born blind. From the moment I entered into the world, I couldn't see my mother's smile, or the deep blue of the Sea of Galilee, or the grandeur of the Temple in Jerusalem. I was blind to it all.

As you can imagine, the job prospects for a man born blind were practically nonexistent in my day, which fated me to a life of begging. I usually tried to hang out as close as possible to the Temple in Jerusalem. Whether it was an attempt to curry some favor with God, or to look more righteous to their peers, people were always more willing to show pity to a blind beggar when they were on their way to worship their God. Notice, I said "their God," not my God. I just couldn't believe that a God who would allow me to suffer my whole life in darkness existed. Or if he did exist, he wasn't the kind of God I wanted to worship.

They say when one of your senses isn't functioning, the other senses get stronger to pick up the slack. I had exceptional hearing. In fact, my whole life, I'd been hearing people's whispered conversations about me. Some didn't realize I could hear them, others just didn't care. I heard their accusations against my parents. "If God is punishing them with a blind son, they must have done something horrible!" The Rabbis taught the principle, "***There is no death without sin, and there is no suffering without iniquity,***" so it made sense people thought that way. I often asked my parents what they'd done that God made me blind, but they didn't know. So I assumed God must have just hated

me. Eventually, I gave up on God altogether. If he didn't care about me, then I wouldn't care about him.

Maybe you've asked similar questions, when there's cancer raging inside you; or you can't shake your addiction; or a loved one dies unexpectedly. The question relentlessly pinballs around your brain, "Is God punishing me for my sins?" And you feel either an unshakeable burden of guilt, or push God out of your life altogether, like I did.

My whole life, I'd heard people blame me or my parents for my blindness, so it wasn't surprising when one Sabbath day, I could sense people's eyes on me, and heard some men ask, "***Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?***" The question was the same. But this time, the answer was different. This "rabbi" replied, "***Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.***"

Pardon the pun, but his answer "opened my eyes" to a possibility I'd never considered. Had God allowed me to be born blind not as angry payback for sin, but as a means to draw me closer to him? Could God be using your ailment, or hardship, or grief not to punish you, but as an opportunity for his grace to shine through in your life?

But then I snapped out of it. "Too good to be true. The best I can hope for is some spare change." But then, this mysterious Rabbi said something a man who'd spent his entire life in darkness couldn't miss. "***While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.***" I scoffed, "If he's the light of the world, I'll never see him!" Or so I thought.

Then he did something strange. He spit on the ground, made mud, and smeared it on my eyelids, instructing me, "***Go, wash in the pool of Siloam.***" At first, I was skeptical. But his words, "***I am the light of the world***" echoed in my head. So I went. Scooping water from the pool, I rinsed the mud off, and for the first time ever, blinked into the sunlight. I saw! I saw trees, birds, smiles, colors, things I'd only imagined. I had been freed from darkness, by the man who claimed to be the Light of the World.

As I sprinted home, a prophecy I'd learned long ago resurfaced. For obvious reasons, it had made an impression on me, that Isaiah had prophesied, ***"Your God will come...then will the eyes of the blind be opened."*** Could it be? Could this man who'd opened my blind eyes be the promised Messiah? "No," I thought. "He's a man, just like me."

Unsurprisingly, my parents, neighbors, and friends were floored! I must have re-told the story a thousand times as people stared incredulously at my eyes. No one knew what to think, so they rushed me off to the Pharisees, the religious leaders of our day.

As people excitedly relayed my story, the Pharisees squinted at me, as if they were the ones who couldn't see. Their shocked faces said, "Isn't that the blind beggar from outside the Temple? It can't be!"

Finally, they asked for an explanation. I simply retold how Jesus ***"put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and now I see."*** My whole life, I'd never seen anything. But after my interaction with Jesus, I could see everything. Shouldn't it have been obvious?

But the Pharisees refused to acknowledge the evidence right in front of their eyes. Looking for reasons to not believe, some argued that Jesus couldn't be ***"from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath."*** Certainly, someone who didn't follow the extreme Sabbath regulations that these holy Pharisees had mapped out for the people, couldn't have performed this amazing miracle by God's power. But others argued, ***"How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?"*** Finally, they turned back to me.

I'd heard how the Pharisees hated Jesus, and how desperately they wanted to stop him. Honestly, even I was still wrestling with the question, "Who is Jesus?" But since he had given me sight, I must be more than just an ordinary man. So, I answered, ***"He is a prophet,"*** like Moses or Elijah of old.

But they didn't really care what I said. The Pharisees didn't want to believe anything except that Jesus was an impostor. They even called in my parents, trying to prove that this was all a big hoax, and I'd never even been blind!

It wasn't just that they didn't want to see the truth about Jesus. They couldn't see the truth about Jesus through the blindness of their stubborn unbelief. They refused to open their eyes. But I just marveled, ***"I was blind, but now I see."*** Because the Light of the World had shined on me.

My thoughts about Jesus had progressed from, "He's just a man," to "he's a prophet," until finally, I couldn't help but proclaim to those spiritually blind Pharisees, ***"Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."*** Jesus was from God. The God I had given up on...hadn't given up on me! Like Jesus had said, could this all have been part of his plans for me?

The Pharisees were seething, but they couldn't refute what everyone could see. So they tried to discredit my testimony. They threw me out of the temple, accusing, ***"You were steeped in sin at birth!"***

That was the first truthful thing they'd said all day. Everyone is born steeped in sin—me, you, the Pharisees, everyone. And all of you were born just like me—blind. Maybe not physically blind, but all people are born spiritually blind sinners—unable to see the truth; not wanting to see the light. We're all trapped in spiritual blindness, clinging to the darkness of unbelief like people hugging the back wall of a dark cave. Even the great hero of faith King David acknowledged, ***"Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."***

I had a far greater problem than just being born physically blind. I was born spiritually blind, and was destined for hell. That's the reality for all people—you, me, the Pharisees, everyone-- unless the Light of the World shines into the darkness of our sinful nature and our unbelief. Jesus changed my life by giving me sight. But even more importantly, Jesus changed my eternal life by giving me eyes of faith.

After the Pharisees threw me out, Jesus came and found me-- just like he'd done the first time. I hadn't been looking for him; I couldn't even see him! He came to me and found me! When a man I'd never seen before asked me, ***"Do you believe in the Son of Man?"*** my heart

started racing. I'd never forget that voice. I believed there was something special about him, but I hadn't connected all the dots just yet. So I asked him, ***“Who is he, sir? Tell me so that I may believe in him.”*** That's when the same Jesus who'd opened my physical eyes also opened my spiritual eyes with his Word. ***“You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking to you.”***

Not only could I see Jesus. More importantly, I could see Jesus...for who he really is; our Savior from sin and unbelief. The Light of the World who shines into our darkness so we can see! I threw myself down at his feet, rejoicing in my new spiritual sight, ***“Lord, I believe!”***

It was as if my whole life suddenly came into focus. Before God formed my blind eyes in my mother's womb, he who had formed Adam from dirt already knew that one day he would spit onto the dirt and give me physical sight—so that his grace could shine through in my life, and so that he could give me eyes of faith. He used my blindness not to drive me away, but to draw me near! And all of the years of darkness were worth it, for an eternity of Light! How merciful is our God!

If I told you that my life is now filled with joy, love, and thanks for Jesus, you'd probably say, “Well, duh! Look what Jesus did for you!” But that's what he's also done for you!

That's the kind of joy, love, and thanks that each of us can shine forth in our lives as parents, spouses, children, employers, or employees. As Paul encourages us in Ephesians, ***“Live as children of light.”*** Let your life shine brightly with the Light of the World, with thankfulness, love, and joy, because just like me, ***“You were once darkness but now you are light in the Lord.”***

Through the work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus has given you eyes of faith too! Whether your blind eyes were opened by washing with water and God's Word through Baptism, or whether the Light pierced your darkness through the Word, we can all rejoice, motivated to live in the light, because by God's grace, you once were blind...but now you see!