

---

## LIFE IN HIS NAME

### UNSEEN BLINDNESS

John 9:13-41

As we look at this passage, I am going to read the entire text, which I admit to you is long. It's longer than what we would usually look at, but it is one event, one episode and it's just too good not to read. It's interesting. It's entertaining. It really teaches itself, so all I really need to do is read the scripture then stop. But I'm not going to do that. I am going to read the scripture and it might help you to know the context.

If you missed last Sunday, Jesus has healed the blind man. He has spit in the dirt and with his spittle and the dust has made mud. He packed it on his eyes and sent him to the pool to wash. He comes back seeing, and this is what happens after that. There are really three parts, three movements. The religious leaders are upset and they interrogate the blind man. Then they interrogate his parents. Then they interrogate him again. Then the chapter ends with conversation between Jesus and the no longer blind man. Let's go to scripture, verses 13-41:

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had 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 had 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." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them. So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet."

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" His parents answered, "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." (His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.) Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

So for the 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.” He answered, “Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” And they reviled him, saying, “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 comes from.” The man answered, “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 worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” They answered him, “You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?” And they cast him out.

Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” He answered, “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.” He said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him. Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.” Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, “Are we also blind?” Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.

Well, there is great power in a good story. It teaches us things. It influences us, and that’s especially true when the story itself is true. This is one of those occasions where the events that took place, the healing, and how it all unfolded and was displayed before the world, illustrate and teach very, very powerfully. One of the things that it displays so clearly is the ugliness of pride.

You have here this depiction of arrogant leaders. They are so mean. They completely lack compassion. It’s hard to imagine a group of people so hardened in their hearts. They don’t even care that this man has been healed of lifelong blindness. That fact seems completely inconsequential. They want to disbelieve it. When they are forced to confront it, it has no impact on them. They are completely insensitive to his condition, to his hurt.

---

They have God-given power and responsibility and they are misusing it. They are not using it to help and to serve and to protect the people that they've been given to lead, to serve. They are abusive in their power out of their pride and arrogance, completely hypocritical. Their questions, their inquisitions are not a search for truth. Instead, their questions are designed to help them control, to help them accumulate power, manipulate others, control others, control their environment. It is not a pretty picture.

In some ways when you are provided this kind of enlargement of a personality trait or of a sin or action, it's very, very helpful. What you have here is human pride blown up life size plus. Just statements like this: "You were born in utter sin, and you would teach us?" -- I mean, that's ugly. I can be ugly. I can be prideful. Amen. I can be very prideful. The kind of statement: "I've forgotten more than you'll ever know" -- it's just arrogant.

They are not honestly evaluating. Their opposition to Jesus is set. If someone has lived with lifelong blindness and they are instantly, miraculously healed, and you are so entrenched in your worldview, and in your pride, and the confidence of your own perspective that that doesn't amaze you, you are blind. You are spiritually blind. The problem with pride is: My pride blinds me from seeing my pride. I see your pride very easily. If you want to know how you are prideful -- it's easy for us to see it in other people, but we do not readily see it in ourselves.

So, what I want to start with is this whole idea of the value of the account here in showing us just how undesirable pride is. It is unattractive and destructive. It's ugly. It's mean. It's without beauty. But it's also destructive. It destroys people. It breaks relationships. It separates relationships and it separates us from God.

Just think about the two parts of this for a moment. If something is without beauty, it's not desirable, but yet, it's constructive. It's productive. We could see value in that. We could easily have something in our lives that we don't really desire, we don't think is beautiful, but it helps. Medicine might be an example of something that isn't pleasant, but it brings a desired result.

Or we could imagine something that is not really productive. It actually cost us, but it's beautiful so we value it. In a sense, that's a little bit what worship looks like. We sacrifice for something that's beautiful. The art lover sees the art, doesn't see it just as a financial investment, but sees beauty in it and is ready to decrease in something else very valuable in order to enjoy its beauty. But pride is ugly and destructive. And we are blind to it.

---

That is really at the heart of the story. It ends with this kind of punch line: “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.” You could reduce this down to this simple idea: You need one thing to follow Jesus, and that is humility. You cannot know God and follow him without humility. Now, I’m reducing the moral or the lesson of the story to that idea. You need some other things to follow Jesus as well, but that is the punch of the story.

Let me just warn you for a minute. This is all still the introduction to the sermon, so just stay with me. I want you to get, really, a distaste for pride in yourself before we too quickly move on to God’s remedy. Pride is so deeply imbedded in our souls, in our spirits, that we want to hold onto this idea that I’m self-sufficient. The constant temptation in my life is to think, “This job will bring me ultimate happiness, financial security will bring me ultimate happiness, my marriage, or this relationship, or this success, or this achievement, or children, or when the children leave will bring me great happiness.” Whatever it is, the problem is that this gives me an illusion of control. This gives me happiness, and I’m going to control and protect and manipulate this, and I can see, I can feel, I can touch that happiness.

That is what scripture calls idolatry. I’m worshipping something created because I really see myself as God. I’m not admitting my dependency, my need for my Maker, my Savior. That’s our default spiritual condition. That’s what we fall back to. We talked about this a little bit last week. When things start to go wrong we fix them, we do everything we can. We go to God in prayer as a last resort all too often.

There is a new Jason Bourne movie that’s come out. I haven’t seen it, but I can tell you what it’s going to be like. There’s probably going to be a scene where Jason Bourne is in a car. He gets shot, he drives off a bridge, and he crashes a long distance into the water. The car sinks all the way to the bottom and the killer stands on the bridge watching it sink and says, “He’s dead. I’ve killed him.” But underneath the water, Jason Bourne is doing some miraculous escape, while shot, only to emerge somewhere down the river or under the bridge, to end up in a supply closet of some hospital where he surgically repairs himself without morphine. That is your pride. You know, “I’ve killed it!” It goes under the surface and there it is, just magically reappearing somewhere else, only stronger and wiser and now really mad and really dangerous.

It’s just where our hearts go. I like to be exalted in my human condition apart from Christ! Jesus wants to set us free from this trap, this cycle, this human condition. We’re happy that in this

---

account we not only have the religious leaders who give us a model of pride, we see a man who is transformed. We see a man who comes to physical sight and spiritual sight.

I'm going to give you three parts to his spiritual healing, to the process of spiritually seeing. These parts are going to seem like they are steps: Step 1, Step 2, Step 3 -- like they're progressive. There is a little bit of that, but as we begin I want you to see they are really interchangeable. They can happen simultaneously, in fact. So let's dig in. The first one is:

I. Beholding.

The man beholds Jesus. In a sense, the word "behold" is the word for "sight," but it's a more serious word for seeing. It is: viewing intently, considering, admiring, studying, watching with keen interest, seeing the value of something. I mean by beholding to look and to see. It assumes an ability to appreciate.

The first thing we notice then, from a spiritual standpoint, is that there is a process. There is a process to his physical healing. Jesus engaged the man, made the mud, put it on his eyes, sent him to the pool. He washes, he sees. But his spiritual sight is very much progressive. If you remember the first time he is questioned by the authorities, what is his testimony of Jesus? "He is a prophet," verse 17. He is a prophet. Now, that's an accurate statement. Jesus was the prophet, the prophet that Moses promised. But it's a completely inadequate, incomplete description of who Jesus is.

By the time we get to the end of the chapter, in verse 38, he is not only giving witness to Jesus, contending with the leaders, but he confesses his faith in Christ. In verse 38 he said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. So, there is a progression to his beholding, and that tells you something. This is probably the most difficult part of the message to convey, so just stay with me, work with me for a moment. It's important for you and for me in our spiritual growth to see that seeing, beholding is a very important part of following Christ.

Maybe one of the easiest ways to illustrate it is to look at how Jesus would tell stories to teach, much like we are following this story to learn. It's influencing us. But Jesus would tell fictional stories. He would tell parables. If you go to Matthew 13, for example, Jesus teaches all about the kingdom with a series of stories.

He tells The Parable of the Sower. A man goes out. He casts his seed and it falls on four different kinds of soil. It falls on the good soil, but it also falls on the path. It falls on rocky ground. It falls

---

amongst the thorns. Jesus goes through each category and talks about how in some cases the seed enters the ground, but it has no roots and the first time trials come it withers and dies. Or when it falls amongst the thorns, the cares of the world choke it out and it dies. Or in another case, the enemy comes like a bird and steals the seed away. But some hear and push down roots and bear fruit.

That story tells you how important seeing is. Your heart condition in responding to the word of God leads you to persevere, put down roots, bear fruit, or to have an inconsequential reaction to God's truth. You see, right now you are either beholding as I preach and teach, or you are not beholding. And that has nothing to do with me. It's not about me.

But when you read the scripture, when you have your devotion, when you spend time with God, when you hear preaching and teaching, you are looking to see the magnificence of God, to see who Jesus is and to see how Jesus shows me the Father. It's God's word showing me Jesus, Jesus showing me the Father, and I'm beholding and I'm amazed.

In these parables, in various ways Jesus is saying, "You know, there's a man. He's walking across a field and he trips over treasure. He sees it and is like, "Wow! Amazing!" He goes and sells everything he has. He buys the land so he can have the treasure in the land. He is seeing spiritually the beauty of Christ. This is what the kingdom is like.

The Pearl of Great Price: A man on a search for pearls has a collection of pearls, but he finds one amazing pearl. He sells everything to buy and own that one amazing pearl. Beholding -- teaching us the value of kingdom vision.

So we now want to say, "Okay. That means that right now I see, and that seems to me to be something that I don't do intentionally. It just happens subconsciously. But then I focus, and I see the value of something and I give it my attention." Now we're talking about how spiritual sight works in our hearts. We give ourselves to what God opens our eyes to see.

Before I leave this first point, what do you do if you say, "You know, Brian, I'm just not interested. I'm just not interested in beholding. I open my bible and I'm bored. I hear you and I'm really bored. What do I do?" Well, what I would say is that if you are a Christian -- obviously if you're not a Christian there is a place of seeing the beauty of Christ and beholding him and seeing the change that he wants to bring - but I just want to say this. If you are a Christian and you are just not

---

interested in spiritual things, I would say that it means you're not seeing, and it may mean that the beauty of grace, the magnificence of the gospel, the real storyline of the bible has not gotten in you and captured your heart.

Just take this account here in John 9. Consider it for a moment. Here is a man who is the least desirable, least capable man in all of Jerusalem for God to do his work through. Here is a man who was ignored by hundreds of people, if not thousands of people, every day – just completely ignored, out of sight to others, despised by others. He would have been in a condition where he would have been in a desperate state had it not been for his parents who probably took care of him to some degree. He begs.

Jesus saves him in this incredible act of humility. Jesus came down, the Creator of the universe, to love this despised, helpless, hopeless, man, and does it in such a way as to expose the ugliness of the pride of those who are so-called spiritual leaders and in power. The more the thing unravels, the more ridiculous it gets. He allows them to expose themselves as he exposes them and saves this man, and not only gives him sight, but gives him eternal life.

That's incredible! If that isn't impressive to you, I don't know what to say. That's amazing! And it's given to you as a paradigm, as a model, as a faith-quickener for what God wants to do in you. If you're sitting here today saying, "I don't know, Brian. I'm a mess, man. I've done this, and this has been done to me. You don't know. I've been doing the same thing and nothing has..." No, no, no. You know what that is? That's spiritual blindness. That's self-sufficiency. That's me looking at my environment, talking about what I will accomplish, what I can do, when God wants to get your eyes off of you to see, "Look, Jesus has just walked into Jerusalem – and he sees you, and he calls you by name." So, beholding is where we start.

## II. Faith.

We looked at this in verse 38. "He said, 'Lord, I believe,' and he worshiped him." The beholding brings the man to a place where his understanding is increasing and he confesses his faith in Jesus Christ. It's not an easy thing to be healed. In one amazing way, life gets better for this man, but in another way it gets difficult very quickly. There are two immediate consequences: rejection and responsibility. Rejection: He is oppressed, persecuted by the people who should have been helping him. There is a bitter twist to that. It's a betrayal -- rejection, oppression. He is really now being used toward some selfish agenda in the name of God. It's so ugly.

---

But more than that, now he's got a whole new responsibility! It's not effective for a man with perfectly good eyesight and health to sit and beg. He has lost his source of income. He now has to do what? He has to take responsibility for his life. The moment when you say, "I'm a mess! My life is a mess! Things have been done to me that make me a mess. But Jesus comes in. Jesus loves me. Jesus died for me. Jesus forgives me. By faith in Jesus, I am forgiven." Now all of a sudden God is saying, "Brian, take responsibility for your life." Yeah, sometimes we don't want that. Sometimes we want to just back up into the darkness. "I like that blindness. I know it's wrong, but it feels so good. It feels so good to hate him and to hold onto this unforgiveness! Can I just feel sorry for myself a little longer?"

Don't get me wrong. I love to feel sorry for myself. And I understand that hurts that we've done to ourselves or that have been done to us – there is a process of going through emotion, the emotional process of understanding it, comprehending it, and a need for healing from deep, profound wounds. I'm not for a moment wanting to make light of that. But I do want to call attention to the idea that there's a place where we move beyond the appropriate grief and process to where we make that our identity. Jesus wants to set you free! He doesn't want that to be your identity. And he's great enough and good enough and wise enough to do it. So, we have a new responsibility. Now we are not only taking responsibility for ourselves in Christ, but for others!

Do you remember that I used to say that the hardest part about being a parent is sibling rivalry? It was just exasperating to me when my kids would fight with one another, because I hate to see one of my kids hurt. The only thing that would make me want to hurt one of them is when they hurt one of the other ones, which obviously wasn't right and I didn't do, ever. I was such a good dad to them. I hated sibling rivalry, and I felt powerless because what happens in the moment is just human nature coming out. You see people you love hurting one another. It takes a lot of wisdom in the moment and a lot of patience, and I didn't always have it.

Well, there's a case of sibling rivalry in the bible -- the story about Cain and Abel that really went bad where Cain killed his brother out of jealousy. Do you remember that Jesus came to him and said, "Hey, where is your brother?" His famous response was "Am I my brother's keeper?" That is how pride separates us. It destroys people and separates us from God and from others.

When Jesus comes in and opens your eyes to your spiritual need and puts you in a place to receive his grace, receive his healing, you begin to take responsibility for yourself. Then, instead of pushing

---

off that responsibility for other people, you embrace that in all of their mess and all of their sin. There is a process.

Before we move on to the last point, let's see if I can bring the first two points together to show you how they are a little bit interchangeable, how it works – sort of like a process, but they're interchangeable. If you know the account of Isaiah's call, the great prophet Isaiah, it's recorded in Isaiah 6. He has this magnificent vision of God -- God in his temple, in his majesty -- and Isaiah is undone in this spiritual vision. As he beholds the Lord and he hears the sound of worship taking place, the glory of the Lord filling the temple, his immediate reaction is to fall on his face and say, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips..." What you have there is beholding. He is seeing the glory of God and immediately he begins to see himself for what he is.

You see, you can stand beside me and feel good about yourself, but you can't stand in the glory of God and feel that way. It's just not going to happen. Now he sees his need. Well, what does God do? A heavenly messenger takes a coal from the altar, places it on Isaiah's lips, and cleanses him. It's a picture of grace.

I want you to see that this is what my friend Tom Hendricks calls "the rhythm of grace." We begin with God. We see him. Then secondly, we have to get honest about ourselves. Third (this is my language, not anyone else's), we wash in the gospel -- the good news that God takes that coal and cleanses us. He pays the penalty of our sin. He releases us from the condemnation, the guilt, and the judgment. Then we receive all that we need. We not only receive cleansing and washing, but grace for all we need -- self-control, power, wisdom -- whatever it is to help us live life. Then finally, where does Isaiah end up? "Here am I! Send me."

So he needs just that fourth step, if you will. He is saying, "I am a man of unclean lips and I speak to people of unclean lips. I won't get it right, and even if I did they wouldn't hear it." So God anoints his lips and cleanses him. He is not only receiving cleansing for his own sin, but the anointing of the Spirit of God to do what God is calling him to do. Then finally, at last he says, "Here am I. Send me. I'm ready to go. Because it's you. It's your grace." You see: beholding, being honest about myself, washed in his grace, receiving all that I need, purposing to go and do. Beholding and faith work together.

---

One more thought here before we go to our last point. Suffering helps. Suffering helps us to see. It's nothing that we desire. It's nothing that we want, but it dismantles our self-sufficiency. The man had the courage to follow Jesus because he had lived perpetually in a place of blindness, being forced to confront his own need. CS Lewis in *The Problem of Pain* has a famous statement. He says, "Pain is God's megaphone." Here is a fuller quote: "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world." Suffering, difficulty, weakness put me in a position to admit "I want to be self-sufficient, but I can't be. I need God."

We talked more about that last week. I just bring it out because it's so relevant here. In your own time go to 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, where Paul helps us to see the value of our weakness in terms of receiving God's grace. Let's go to the last point real quick.

### III. Worship.

Beholding. Faith. Worship. Verse 38: "He said, 'Lord, I believe,' and he worshiped him." Worship fuels the process of seeing. In fact, it's a part of beholding. It's a part of faith. Throughout the whole account the man is worshipping Jesus. The problem is that his knowledge is limited in the beginning, so his worship is limited. But the more he comes to understand, the more he sees, the more he comprehends, the greater his worship is.

This is why you find a great illustration of this when Paul talks about spiritual gifts, speaking in tongues and prophesying in 1 Corinthians 12, 13, and 14. The church in Corinth was getting together. People had this gift to speak in tongues, but people were not understanding. Paul says, "Wait a minute. I'm not denying that your gift is real and that it's from the Spirit of God, but you are using it unwisely because real worship can't take place without understanding. You need to practice your gifts in a way that edifies both believers and helps unbelievers to understand, so that they can respond in faith and worship." He wasn't against the supernatural manifestation of God and the Spirit and the gifts in the lives of those believers, but he was saying they have to be practiced in a way where understanding can take place.

Well, as understanding increases in this healed man, oh now we see. Beholding. I want my understanding of who Jesus is, my picture of his beauty to be constantly enlarged, because that will fuel faith and worship. Now it's just the cycle; they are just perpetually encouraging one another:

beholding, faith, and worship. The result in this man is transformation. He comes to spiritual sight as well as physical sight.

Let me conclude. There is a depiction of pride in our story and we say, “I don’t want to be like that. I don’t want to be mean. I don’t want to be destructive.” But there is also a picture of a transformation that takes place. Like Jason Bourne, who resurfaces stronger and wiser than before, we have come to understand that our pride cannot be defeated by our own self-effort.

If your response to this message today is: “I don’t want that; I don’t want to be that person, so give me the list, show me what I have to do,” it may mean that your focus is still on your own self-sufficiency. Here is the message of the bible: You and I need a savior. I’m a blind man sitting at the entrance to the temple. I need Jesus to open my eyes. I want to live a life where I’m looking to the sufficiency of Christ, asking for the help of the Spirit, not so I won’t take responsibility, but so that I can take responsibility -- for my life, and the life of others.

Let’s pray.