

That You May Believe & See

John 9

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, August 5, 2018

Well, good morning everyone. Before we dive into our sermon for today, just a couple of announcement type things. As you've seen in your bulletin, next week we'll have a guest preacher with us. His name is James Barbouletos. He's the pastor of Ahtanum Pioneer Church in Yakima, Washington. He's a friend of mine.

James and I graduated from the Master's Seminary back in 2007. He's an alumnus of TMS, and we started ministry around the same time. We actually graduated, got married and started ministry all in the same season of life. And I've asked him to come preach to us next Sunday. He's a family member of the Brodeur family. He married Rose Coward's daughterly – LeAnne. She's from Chilliwack and I'm sure she wants to come back to get some Chilliwack corn. I'm sure that's part of the joy of that.

Interestingly, if you notice in your bulletins, James will be preaching on the ... He's preaching through the Gospel of Mark at his church, and that coincides with what we're learning in the Gospel of John. I asked Him to come preach on some things that John doesn't talk about, like the parables of Jesus. I'll mention that in a moment. But John doesn't mention any of Jesus' parables. He left those out for a reason. And so, to balance our study, I've asked James to come talk about that next week. It should be a great time. I think you'll really enjoy his ministry.

Then the week after that, just as a way of announcement, we're having a baby dedication here at the church; the first one that we've ever done. If you've noticed, we've had a lot of babies born in the last year or so here at Grace Fellowship. Every time you go downstairs, there seems to be another one, which is such a blessing. It's so wonderful to see that. And in light of that, we want to give our parents an opportunity to dedicate their children to the Lord. And we also want to commit ourselves to them as a church, because parenting is hard work, amen? Come tell me your secrets, I want to know your secrets. It takes the help of other people, right? Just for some support and prayer and a shoulder to cry on. And we want to commit ourselves to being that for these families.

And the way this will work is that since it's our first dedication service (we haven't done one before), we're going to play catch up. If you've had a baby in the last year or so, even if they're past the newborn stage, please feel free to be a part of this. It's open to everyone. Contact our church office and get on board with that. It'll be August 19th (two weeks from today). So, August 19th.

With that said, I want to just jump into our sermon for today by turning to the Gospel of John. If you haven't already turned there, if you would open your Bibles with me to the Gospel of John. And as you're doing that, it's been said that history is made up of biographies. It's made up of the stories or memories of people's lives. If you've ever read through a history book lately, you'll know that's what it's about. It's about people and what they did and what they said, and those types of things. And the Bible is no different from that. The Bible is a book of biographies. It's a book of the story of peoples' lives, particularly the story of the life of Jesus Christ.

If you add up all the words in it (this is an interesting statistic), 47% of the New Testament is all about the life and times of Jesus. 47% of it. I counted them up this week (I'm just kidding. I didn't do that.) But there's 138,000 Greek words in the New Testament. I did not count all those up. But there's 138,000 Greek words in the New Testament - 64,000 of them are the Gospels. It's only four books; Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. But those four books make up half of our New Testament. And the entire thing, all those books is about the biography of Jesus and his life, what He did, and what He said, and His ministry.

We could add that all of those books look at His life from a different angle. I wanted to kind of walk you through that this morning, because it really helps explain some of what the Gospel of John is. But Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, all give a unique perspective on Jesus' life. For instance, Matthew is the Gospel to the Jews, because he wrote from that perspective. He wrote to reach the Jewish people and as such, he quoted the Old Testament more than any other Gospel. And he quoted Jesus more, interestingly enough.

Matthew was a tax collector, which means he liked taking notes. He liked to write things down, and some have even said he was probably the note taker of the disciples. And everywhere they went, he probably had a piece of parchment or his iPad or something, and he would be writing down what Jesus said. And as you read his Gospel, you'll see some of Jesus' longest sermons are in the Gospel of Matthew. The Olivet Discourse, the Sermon on the Mount, His parables (His long parables) are in there as well, because he wanted to reach the Jews. That was the point of his book.

Then you have the Gospel of Mark which is the Gospel of action. And everything you read in the Gospel of Mark is all about motion and activity. A friend of mine says it reads like a comic book. You know, Jesus did this and then He did that, and then He did this and then He did that. Because Mark was a young man when he knew Jesus Christ. As far as we know, he was probably the young man who escaped in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Mark 14 says that when Jesus was arrested, a young man was wearing a linen garment and when the soldiers tried to grab it, he slipped out of it and ran away. It was probably Mark. And if that was the case, then his memories of Jesus would be the memories of a young man. It would be action, action, action, excitement, busy time. And he wrote from that perspective. I've told people, if you're reading the Bible for the first time, jump into the Gospel of Mark because it won't put you to sleep. It will keep your attention.

Then we come to Luke which is the Gospel for the Gentiles. Luke wrote for the Gentiles or the non-Jews. The opening chapters of Luke tell us he was writing to a man named Theophilus which is a Gentile name, a Greek name. He wrote from that perspective. He gave us the dates and places and details that would be interesting to a non-Jew. Now, some say Luke was a Gentile. And if he was a Gentile, he was the only Gentile that wrote a book in the Bible.

Then we come to the Gospel of John, which is a different thing entirely. It's set apart from all those other books, because as you know, John is the Gospel of belief. That's why he wrote. He didn't write to a particular audience, to the Jews or the Gentiles. He didn't write with a lot of action. He wrote so that you would believe, anyone would believe. And in doing so (this is the interesting thing about the Gospel of John), 90% percent of the material in John's Gospel is

completely original. It means nine out of every ten verses you read in the Gospel of John is found nowhere else in the Bible.

In fact, the other Gospels are called the synoptic Gospels because they were seen together. Matthew, Mark and Luke saw those things together. John didn't do that. He talked about things that no one else had seen or had written about before.

For instance, we've gone (if you've been with us on Sunday mornings) through eight chapters in the Gospel of John, as you know. We've gone from John 1 through John 8, and the only thing that's repeated in the other Gospels that we've looked at, is the ministry of John the Baptist, the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus walking on water, and that's it. Everything else is entirely original to John.

The discussion about the Word being made flesh, Jesus turning water into wine, the conversation with Nicodemus, the woman at the well, the nobleman, the lame man of the pool of Bethesda, all this stuff in John 7 and chapter 8, it's all original. If John didn't tell us about it, we would never know that it happened.

You can add to this, that John leaves out all kinds of stuff the other Gospels mentioned. He doesn't talk about Jesus' birth or His baptism. John doesn't mention the Mount of Transfiguration or Jesus' ascension into heaven. He doesn't mention any parables. That's why I asked James to come next week and talk about the parables, because John doesn't give any of those. And the reason for this, church history tells us, is because John wrote after the other apostles. He wrote his Gospel last, which means he knew what the other people wrote about. And he didn't want to repeat that.

John was the only one to die as an old man. Everyone else died young who followed Jesus. They were martyred at an early age. John was the last man standing, which means he probably saw the other Gospels and knew about them, and he gave us something unique. We actually have the statements (and thanks for bearing with me through some of this. I find this very intriguing.) ... We have the statements of several men in church history who tell us why John wrote the way he did.

One of them is a guy named Irenaeus, who was discipled by Polycarp, who was discipled by John. This is someone who is a generation removed from John himself. Now, here's what he said about this Gospel. He said, "After Matthew, Mark and Luke had written their accounts of Jesus, then John the disciple of the Lord gave forth his Gospel while he was living in Ephesus in Asia." In other words, after everyone else had finished, John wrote his Gospel. Clement of Alexandria (one more thought on this) he said, "John wrote last of all, conscious that the outward facts had been set forth in the Gospels and was urged on to write his Gospel."

But I mention all this because this morning we're coming to another one of those unique stories in the Gospel of John. One of those stories that's mentioned nowhere else in the Bible, and it's the healing of the blind man in John 9. If you want to turn over there in your Bibles to John chapter 9.

As you're doing that, if you're joining us for the first time this morning, we're in the middle of a series called the "That You May Believe" series. I just told you that John says that he wrote this

book so that you may believe. He says at the end of his Gospel that “Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that by believing you may have life in His name.” And one of the ways John helps us to believe in this Gospel, is by telling us stories from the life of Christ, and then explaining them.

In fact, if you read the Gospel of John, that's the pattern of his writing. He gives you a story and then he explains it. Then he gives you another story and then he explains that. Story - explanation, story – explanation. For instance, in John chapter 6, Jesus feeds the 5,000. That's the story, that's what happened. And then Jesus says, “I'm the Bread of life.” That's the explanation. Then you come to John 7 where Jesus attends the Feast of Booths, and He watches them pour out water on the offering. That's the story, and then He says, “I'm the Water of life.” That's the explanation.

Here in John 9, we see the story of a blind man getting his sight back. That's the story, that's what happened. But if you look in verse 39 of John chapter 9 (just skipping down a little bit), I want to go ahead and give you the explanation. Because it's important for what we're going to read about in this book. Here's the interpretation of what we're going to read about in verse 39. It says, “And Jesus said, ‘For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind.’” That's the interpretation of this event. That's Jesus' explanation of it.

And it sounds kind of strange, until you insert the word “spiritual” in here. If you look at that verse again, we could say it this way, “For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see spiritually may see, and that those who do see spiritually may become blind.” In other words, Jesus said, “I came into this world to change things. I came in to turn them around, to give sight to those who don't have it (spiritual sight), and to take it away from those who do; to bring salvation to those who don't have it, and to take it away from those who do.”

If you remember from last time in John 8, Jesus said, “I am the Light of the world.” Remember that? We talked about that last time. And as a result of that, the leaders rejected Him. They threw out the Light. If you think about it in John chapter 8, the Jews chased God out of the temple. Now, I couldn't find a way to do it, but I thought about titling the sermon last week “Chasing God Out of His Own House”. That's what they did. And you can't think of anything worse than that, right?

As a result, here in John chapter 9, as he does this miracle, Jesus tells them, “As a result of you doing that, judgement is coming. I'm going to take your Light away. I'm going to make you blind” or “I'm going to leave you in your blindness. You're already blind,” He says. “I'm just going to leave you there.” “Do you want to put out the Light?” He says, “Fine, I'll take the Light away.” He said, “Do you want to chase me out of My own house? Okay, I'll go. You can stay blind.” This is a terrible pronouncement of judgment.

But it's a reminder that if you don't want the Light, the Light won't stick around. If you don't want salvation and you reject it and reject it and reject it and you chase it and chase it and chase it away, salvation will eventually leave you. And one day you'll die. And if you die without Christ, you will be judged. And Jesus says here, that's what's going to happen.

Make no mistake, God is merciful. His mercies are new every morning, “great is Thy faithfulness”. He is a God who loves to save sinners. But God doesn't like it when His mercy gets thrown back in His face. I mean nobody would like that. And there are consequences to that. And one of them in this passage is that you stay blind.

From this point on in the life of Jesus (we're going to see this in the weeks to come), the leaders are going to get blinder and blinder and blinder. And they're going to go further and further and further into the darkness, to the point that they're going to kill their own Messiah. They're going to put Him on a cross. And as they do it, they're going to say, “May His blood be on us and our children.” You can even read the accounts of the cross, and they go around mocking Him when He's on the cross.

That leads to our passage for this morning. A lot of these things start here. And if you're taking notes in John 9, let me just give you the outline. It's pretty simple. There's three types of blindness we see in this passage. If you're taking notes, we see three types of blindness in this passage. The passage starts off by talking about a man born blind (we'll talk about that), born without sight. But it uses that to talk about some other types of blindness. And let's just jump into the first one. The first one is this, the first type of blindness is just physical blindness.

The story begins by describing a man who was born physically blind. That's what led him to Jesus, that's what started the whole thing off. And if you read in chapter 9:1, it starts the story this way, it starts the chapter this way. It says, “As He passed by, Jesus saw a man blind from birth.”

Now, we can stop there and actually point out a few things about what's going on here. The first is that it says Jesus passed by this man. It doesn't say where he passed by. But, if you read straight from John 8:59 through chapter 9:1, it tells you that. The last verse of chapter 8 says, “Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple. And as He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth.”

In other words, this whole thing happens as Jesus is passing by the temple, right? As He's passing by the leaders who are trying to kill Him. As they picked up stones to stone Him, as they ran after Him, Jesus hid Himself and He passed by a man blind from birth.

Now, I don't know about you, but if somebody was trying to kill me, I would not stop and heal a man, right? I couldn't heal a man anyway. But I don't think I would do that. I wouldn't stop and have a conversation with him or anybody, right? I would get out of there. But Jesus had a different agenda, He was never too busy to help people.

Which leads to another thing to point out here, and that is that this man's condition was bad, he was begging. The passage goes on and actually mentions that in verse 8 that he was a beggar. But blind people at this time had only one source of income, only one way to make a living and that was begging. They had only one job, and that was to ask for money.

The best place to ask for money was at the temple on a feast day, right? It was the most lucrative spot because the people were in a giving mood. They would be very generous that day. And so, the beggars would sit outside the gates of the temple and ask for alms from the people passing through. As a matter of fact, the temple was also surrounded by guards that could protect the

beggars and keep them from being robbed.

But the point is that this wasn't just a blind man in John chapter 9. This was a helpless blind man. He was in a very bad spot, living hand to mouth. And you could add to that, in verse 9 it says, "The man was blind from birth." He was always that way. He was, I think it's described as congenital blindness. He had never in his entire life seen a thing. People can go blind at different stages of life, right? And they can remember seeing things, remember the colors, you remember the shapes, that kind of stuff. This guy couldn't remember anything. He had never seen a thing. Which is why in the passage, as Richard read, the blind man goes on and says, "No one has ever heard of someone healing a man blind from birth." It was so unusual.

Which means that (and this is an interesting point) Jesus saw him. He didn't see Jesus, right? I mean Jesus picked him out of the crowd, not the other way around. This is sovereign grace, sovereign mercy. And apparently, the disciples pick up on that. Because before Jesus could do anything (it's almost like they could read His mind, or they could see what He was looking at), they say in verse two, it says, "And His disciples asked Him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?'"

I did some study on this, and the number one cause of blindness, or one of the number one causes of blindness, at this time in history was gonorrhea. It was a sexually transmitted disease. At one point in history, as many as 90% of people who were born blind got it from that condition. They got it from their parents. Parents sinned, they suffered.

In the minds of the disciples, this is what's going on here. The parents messed up and now this guy is suffering, or something like that. The Jews believed suffering was caused by sin. It was a common thought of theirs. Like Job, remember Job's friends? That's what they said. And they got that from passages like Exodus 20:5, which says, "For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me."

They took that to mean that if your father sins, it would make you blind or something like that. If your father or mother messed up, it would have consequences for you, which could be true. But there's other passages in the Old Testament that balance that out, like Ezekiel 18:4. You might just want to write that down because it's very helpful here. Ezekiel 18:4 says, "The soul who sins will die." Do you get the point of that? You suffer for your own sins. Or Deuteronomy 24:16, which says, "Fathers shall not be put to death for their sons nor sons shall be put to death for their fathers. Everyone shall be put to death for his own sins." You're put to death for your own sins. Suffering is not always caused by that. Sometimes it is, but not always.

Jesus goes on to say this in verse 3, "Jesus answered, 'It was neither that this man sinned nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him.'" In other words, this happened to display the works of God. This happened to bring God glory. That was the point of all this. Which is an amazing thing to think about, and we could do a whole sermon on that. But Jesus doesn't dwell on this because in verse 4, He says, "We must work the works of Him who sent me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work." In other words, "I don't want to stand around arguing theology when there is work to be done, I want to heal this guy. I don't want to stand around arguing this when people are coming to kill Me."

In verse 5, He says, “While I’m in the world, I am the Light of the world.” In other words, “I need to let My light shine, I need to help this guy.” And that’s what He’s going to do. And if you read on in verses 6 through 8 (I won’t read it for time), but it says Jesus spat on the ground, which implies He was outside the temple at this point. He was where the ground was, the dirt was; the gates where the beggars sat. And He made clay out of the spittle. And I was kind of trying to figure this out, how much spit it would take to do that. Maybe if it’s divine spit, it has more power in it. I don’t know how that works.

But this is also interesting, He applied it to the man’s eyes, and the man didn’t punch Him. I don’t know about you, but if someone makes spit and they want to put it on my eyes, we’re going to have a problem, right? But he doesn’t stop Him, the man doesn’t. He puts it on the man’s eyes, and He told him to wash at the pool of Siloam, which is on the eastern side of the temple.

Why did He do that? I mean in most of Jesus’ miracles, He just said the word and they were healed. Why does he do this here? And we don’t really know, John doesn’t say. But we do know there were two other times when Jesus did this. In Mark 7 and Mark 8, He healed a deaf man and a blind man that way. He did this before.

We also know that this would have made the man get up and do something. That could be one reason why He did this. Even if the man didn’t believe in Jesus, even if he didn’t believe God could heal him, he would still have to go and wash the mud out of his eyes. And furthermore, he hadn’t seen Jesus, right? He didn’t know who He was. And this would have given him an opportunity to ask Him and think about Him, and just find out who healed me.

If you notice, verse 7 says, “As a result of all this, he came back seeing,” which is amazing. He goes down blind, someone leading him probably. I wonder if one of the disciples led him down to the pool of Siloam. And he came back seeing. He goes down one type of man, he comes back another. He goes down with one type of life (a life of a beggar, a life of a helpless person), and he comes back able to see.

Verses 8 through 9 tell us how impactful this miracle was to the people who knew him. In verse 8 it says, “Therefore the neighbors, and those who previously saw him as a beggar, were saying, ‘Is not this the one who used to sit and beg?’ Others were saying, ‘This is he,’ still others were saying, ‘No, but he is like him.’ And he kept saying, ‘I am the guy.’”

In other words, he changed so much in that amount of time that the people who knew him, couldn’t even recognize him. They didn’t even know if it was him or not. The miracle was complete. It was so perfect that his own friends couldn’t get him. And the point here is that this is how strong the Light is. It’s strong enough to change a man like this. This is how strong Jesus is. He is strong enough to change a man like this.

In verse 5, He says, “I am the Light of the world,” which is what He said earlier in chapter 8. And now He shows us that - by giving Light to a blind man. In other words, He didn’t just talk about the Light, He showed us the Light, and the power of it. He didn’t just give this man something to see, He gave him something to see with. And He healed him completely.

Just to show you how incredible this is, there was a book written years ago by a neurologist, a brain doctor named Oliver Sacks. And he told several stories about brain issues and interesting

cases that he came across. And one was about a man who was born blind from childhood, but he was healed by a surgery in his 50s and he couldn't handle it. It was too much for him. Because after he was healed (he'd been blind for 50 years or 40 something years), his brain couldn't process it. He couldn't make out the colours. He could see them, but he couldn't figure out what they were and the lights. He couldn't identify things as they moved backwards and forwards. His mind, his brain couldn't process that.

Dr. Sacks summarized that the only way for this to work is for that man to die and be born again. Now, the only way for him to cope with that, is to start all over again. He said the interim process is too horrible, the limbo is too much. If you noticed, this guy in John 9 doesn't have any limbo. There's no interim period. There's no process. He doesn't even need glasses. I thought about having eye surgery to try to take away my glasses. This guy doesn't even need glasses.

Now, Jesus just healed him, and he's healed. He said the word, and that's it. And this is a perfect illustration of salvation. That's the whole point of John 9. When Jesus saves us, that's what He does. He says the word and we're healed. He says the word and we're born again. Jesus doesn't heal this man half way, and He doesn't save us halfway. He saves us completely. He didn't do part of the work, and the man did the rest. That was not the point of him washing his eyes off. Jesus did everything. At the cross, our Lord did not say, "It has begun," He said, "It's finished. It's over. I did everything," He says. He didn't say, "I got the ball rolling and now you can do the rest." He said, "I did the rest, I did it all."

I mention that because some of you may be wrestling with that this morning. You may feel like you're in limbo with Jesus. I'm new to British, Columbia. But I've had quite a few conversations with people who ask questions like, "Can God really save me?" I mean church people. "Can God really forgive me after all I've done? Is He that powerful? Is He that strong? Is He that mighty?" Well, let me just ask you as you read this passage, how strong is the Light? I mean how mighty is the Son of God? Of course, He can save you. You may be wondering, "Has He abandoned me? Has He left me in the darkness?" Well, let me just say you're in church right now, and that's saying something. You're here, because you haven't rejected the Light, not like these guys did.

You know, Hebrews 7:25 says that, "He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him." I mean forever means forever. And Jesus is able to save you forever. Hebrews 10:14 says, "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified." And that word "perfected" means "completed" or "finished". Jesus can complete you with His one offering on the cross. He can finish your salvation. But I mention that to say if He could heal a man like this, He could do the same thing for you this morning.

That leads to a second type of blindness we see in this passage, that we've alluded to a little bit, and that is spiritual blindness. You see the man's physical blindness in this passage and how Jesus heals that. But it leads to a second type of blindness, and that is spiritual blindness. The spiritual blindness of the Jews. Augustine called the Jews blind men carrying lanterns. Because he said they were people who had the truth, they had the light, but they were blind to it. They couldn't see it. And that's what you read about next in this passage.

And if you look down in verse 13, I want to read this just, so you can feel the scope of it. I know Richard already read this. If you don't mind being patient with me while I do that, but I want to

read this section because it does show you the scope and the problem of these men. In verse 13, it says,

13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who was formerly blind. 14 Now it was a Sabbath on that day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. 15 And then the Pharisees also were asking him again how he received his sight. And he said to them, "He applied clay to my eyes, and I washed, and I see."

Now, I want you to notice that's the first time he tells what happened.

16 Therefore some of the Pharisees were saying, "This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath." But others were saying, "Well, how can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And there was a division among them. 17 So they said to the blind man again, "What do you say about Him, since He opened your eyes?" And he said, "He is a prophet." 18 The Jews then 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, 19 and questioned them, saying, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? Is this your son? Then how does he now see?" 20 His parents answered them and said, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 21 but how he now sees, we don't know; or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him; he is of age, he will speak for himself. 22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone confessed to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue. And for this reason, his parents said, "He is of age, ask him." 24 So a second time they called the man who had been born blind, and said to him, "Give glory to God; we know this man is a sinner." 25 He then answered, "Whether He is a sinner, I don't know; one thing I do know, I was blind, now I see." [It's about the most common-sense statement in the Bible.] 26 So they said to him, "What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?" 27 And he answered them, "I told you already and you didn't listen; why do you want to hear it again? You do not want to become His disciples too, do you?" 28 They reviled him. [The word "revile" means "insulted, slandered, abused him".] And said, "You're His disciple, we are disciples of Moses. 29 We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we don't know where He is from." 30 And the man answered and said to them, "Well, here's an amazing thing, you do not know where He is from, and yet He opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing and does His will, God hears Him. 32 Since the beginning of time it has not been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind.

By the way, in the Old Testament, there were several accounts of the Lord healing a blind person. But to my knowledge, I don't think any of them were born blind. I think they become blind later on. In verse 33, "If this man were not from God, He could do nothing. And they answered him, 'You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us?' So they put him out."

I can't say everything about this passage for the sake of time. But I do want to mention what happens at the end of this. Because it shows the extent of these guys' blindness. By the time you get to the first century, the Jews had created 24 grounds of excommunication from the synagogue, from the temple. They had 24 grounds to throw somebody out, and they had three stages to it. There's three stages to the expulsion. The first two stages were warning stages, the

last one was the final excommunication.

But to give you a taste of what this passage is talking about, the first stage was called the *Neziphah* or “the rebuke” stage. Which included anything from a verbal rebuke to a beating or a flogging. That was how they would start off their excommunication process. They would warn you and maybe rough you up a little bit or have the soldiers do that, and then they would let you go. You’d learned your lesson.

Which led to the second stage, which was called the *Neddui* or “the thrust” stage. If you kept sinning after the first stage and you didn't repent, they would thrust you out of the synagogue for a period of about seven or 30 days to see what you would do. It was just kind of a waiting period.

If that continued, it would lead to the third stage which was called the *Cherem*, which was “the ban”. This was the final stage. In their writings, they would say they would “un-synagogue” you or “un-temple” you. In other words, they would treat you as if you didn't exist. There had to be an assembly of ten men to pronounce that ban, and it was done with several curses and the blast of a trumpet. It was a very formal thing. But from that point on, you were as good as dead to the Jews. You simply didn't exist.

You couldn't pray with them, worship with them, you couldn't visit them. In fact, the rabbis said you could not come within four cubits or seven feet from a Jew during this time. And when you died, they threw stones on your coffin as if to say, “We couldn't stone him in life, we’ll stone him in death.” And they forbade anyone from mourning over you. If they caught wind that your family members were crying over you at your funeral, they would try to stop it. It was absolute rejection, complete abandonment.

I mention that because that shows you how far gone the leaders had become with Jesus, how much they hated Him. I mean not only do they hate Jesus, but they hate anyone who's associated with Him. Not only did they chase Him out, but they chase out anyone who has anything to do with Him. Verse 34 says this is what they do with the blind man, they put him out - out of the synagogue, out of the temple.

That probably refers to the second stage because they had a process to go to the last stage of the expulsion. But this was the temporary period of seven or 30 days, where they would cut you off and see what you would do. Because he spoke highly of Jesus, that was his crime. They threw him out because he confessed that Jesus had healed him and He was a prophet. And they did this (the point of the whole passage is this), because they were blind.

If you notice, over and over and over again in this section, they just blow past common sense, right? I mean the guy says, “Look, God doesn't hear the prayers of a sinner and He heard Jesus’ prayers.” In verse 32, he says, “Since the beginning of time, it's never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind.” And they couldn't see it because they were blind. This is the way unbelief works or the way it can work. This is the way hypocrisy can work. It attacks the Light. It doesn't want to have anything to do with it.

I was studying this in church history. The first persecutors of the church were not atheists, it was religious people. R. C. Sproul says “The reality in the first century was that the most intense persecution of the church came not from the Romans, but from the Jewish community.” Why?

Because the Light made them feel guilty. It pointed out their flaws. Everyone looks nice in the dark, right? If any of you are dating, you know, you want to see your future spouse in the light, right? You don't want to see them just in the dark. The light shows you everybody's flaws. And therefore, they hated it. The first persecutors of the church were the Jews.

I read a story recently also that in history, it wasn't just the Jews, the church, the false church, the hypocritical Church in history attacked the true church over this. There's a story about a lady during the Spanish Inquisition who was caught with a Bible in her house, in the walls of her house where she was hiding it. And so, to punish her, the authorities (the church authorities) put her in the wall with her Bible and suffocated her to death. They said, "You want to hide your Bible? Okay, you can die with it." And they buried her in her own house. But they did that because they hated the Light. They did that because it made them out to be hypocrites. That's what these guys are doing here in John 9.

This man confronts their darkness, he confronts their blindness, and they attack him. They lunge at him. I've never had anyone hit me in counselling before, but I've had a few people storm out of the office. You point out their sins, you point out their flaws, you try to be gracious about it, and sometimes they lunge at the Light, right? That's what these guys are doing here. Let me tell you, that doesn't please God. You need to be thankful for the Light. You need to be thankful when someone points out your sin.

Robert Murray M'Cheyne said, "The person who loves you the most is the one who tells you the most truth about yourself." I mean the people who love you the most, are the people who tell you what you're really like, right? And you should be thankful if you have friends that point out your flaws. You should be grateful for that.

I told you guys when I first came to Grace Fellowship, someone gave me a great compliment. They said they can follow me because I don't use any big words. And I was getting kind of proud about that. I was really proud of that. Until I told a close friend of mine that, and he said, "Jeremy, you don't know any big words." You know, you need people like that in your life, right? Who will point out the truth. Like that is the truth, I don't know any.

J. C. Ryle says this (this is even more helpful), he says,

Of all states of mind into which men may fall, this is by far the most dangerous because so long as a person is candid, fair and honest-minded, there is hope for him, however ignorant he may be. He may be in dark at the present, but is he willing to follow the Light? That's what matters to God. He may be walking in the broad road, but is he ready to listen to someone who will show him a better way? That's what God cares about. In a word, is he teachable?

J. C. Ryle says, "If these questions can be answered 'yes', then we have hope for salvation. If not, there is cause for despair."

Listen friends, if you're teachable, there is hope. If you're willing to follow the light, you can be saved. And these men didn't have it. When you have your sins pointed out to you, do you say, "Thank you Lord for the Light. Thank you for telling me the truth. That hurts, I don't like, it's uncomfortable, but it's the Light." If you do, there's hope for you.

Let me just say, this would be a discouraging story if it stopped here. But it goes on, it gives us one more type of blindness, and this will close us out from this morning. The first type is physical blindness. The man is born physically blind, he couldn't see a thing. Second is spiritual blindness. The leaders can't see a thing either, spiritually speaking. It's really sad. They call themselves disciples of Moses. They call themselves these great people, and here they are killing the Messiah, trying to kill the Messiah.

That leads to a third type of blindness that wraps all this up. And I really didn't know what to call this one. I was kind of stumped, but I called it this: transformational blindness (or you can call it redeemed blindness) ... transformational blindness. By the time you get to end of this passage, the man is transformed. He is a different person on the inside and out. And if you'd read in verse 35, it talks about that. It says,

35 Jesus heard that they had put him out, and finding him, He said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" 36 And he answered, "Well, who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" 37 And Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him..."

Interesting statement, right? "You've both seen Him (now that you can see), and He's the one talking with you. And he said, 'Lord, I believe.' And he worshipped Him." He worshipped Him because He was the Son of God.

Just a few things in these final verses here. If you notice, look at how kind Jesus is to this man. Verse 35 says that, "As soon as He heard that the man had been put out of the synagogue ..." put out in the sense what we just talked about; cut off from the Jews, treated like he didn't exist. As soon as He heard about that, Jesus found him. He finds him sitting outside the temple at the start of the chapter, and He finds him sitting outside the synagogue here at the end. He found him once, He finds him again, because He's that kind of Saviour. He loves to seek and save the lost.

I want you to notice how the man changes. At the start of the chapter, he didn't know who Jesus was. And at the end of it, he's worshipping Him. He's transformed. He's different. Then I want you to notice who is not transformed. I want you to notice who stays blind at the end of this, and who the judgment falls on.

If you remember, this kind of ties the chapter together. But at the start of this whole thing, the disciples were judging the blind man. Do you remember that? They were saying, "Rabbi who's sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?" But if you notice, by the time you get to the end of the story, nobody is judging the blind man anymore. The judgment falls on the Pharisees. If you read in verse 39, it tells you where the judgment falls.

39 And Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind." 40 Those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things and said to Him, "We are not blind too, are we?" 41 And Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

Now, we don't know why – at least I don't know why – the Pharisees were here at the end of the story. John doesn't say. Maybe they found Jesus and had cooled off by then. They were trying to kill Him, remember, in the temple? Why they're not killing Him now, I don't know. But Jesus

does tell them, “If you would confess and believe in Me, you would have no sin for it would be forgiven. But since you don't do that, your sin remains. You're going to stay in the darkness and not be transformed.”

Which leads me to an important point, and that's this: it doesn't matter how much you know if you don't believe it, right? It doesn't matter how much you know if it doesn't penetrate your heart. The Pharisees knew more theology than this blind man. They knew more Bible. Many of them had almost the entire Old Testament memorized. That was part of your induction process into the Pharisees, and they didn't believe it. So, it did them no good. These were the PhDs in theology. These were the seminary professors. These were the top of the food chain, and they were blind. It doesn't matter how much you know if you don't believe it.

The story is told of a young man who won the state Bible drill in Tennessee. Do you guys have a Bible drill here in Canada? Is that a Canadian thing? No, okay. It's a contest to see how much Bible you know. And they do Bible memory. And they do things like you know, you put your hand on your Bible like this, and they say, “Find the book of Titus”. And you know, everybody turns and that kind of thing.

But the story is told of a young man who won this contest, and then he got thrown out for stealing Bibles. I don't know, who would you sell a stolen Bible to? I don't know. But that's what he was doing. He was stealing these Bibles and selling them on the side. He won the contest, he knew the Bible, but he didn't believe it. He knew Scripture, but it didn't mean anything to him.

You don't want to do that this morning, you want it to mean something to you. If not, judgment will fall on you like these Pharisees. I mean even if you know only a little bit, you want to believe it with all your heart. All this man knows at the end of John 9, is that Jesus is the Son of Man and that He healed Him, and then he believes and worships, and he's saved. Very little theology, but he believed what he knew. And that will be enough to save you this morning. Will you follow his example today? Will you believe with all your heart?

Knowledge is a good thing. Knowledge is important, but if it only stays in your head and never goes to your heart, it is very, very dangerous. They say knowledge needs to go six inches, from here to here. Will you let it do that today? If all you can do is say, “Lord, I'm a poor blind sinner but I want to know more, He'll honour that.” If you say as this blind man did, “Who is He Lord, that I may believe in Him?” He'll honour that too.

To tell you one more story, an elderly lady once accepted Christ and applied for membership in her local church. And they asked her, “Were you a sinner before you were saved?” And she said, “Yeah, I was.” And they said, “Well, were you a sinner afterwards?” She said, “Yeah, I'm a sinner now.” They said, “What changed in you then?” And she said, “I don't really know how to explain it, except that I used to be a sinner running to sin, and now I'm a sinner running from sin.” And the church accepted her into membership that day.

Are you a sinner running from sin? That's what God wants. Are you running to the Light? Let's pray and thank the Lord for the Light He's given us this morning.

Father, we thank you, Lord, for this amazing story of a man who was healed who was born blind. Not only healed, but he was transformed. And it's amazing to think that this guy had such a

rough life at the start of the chapter, and at the end of the chapter, he's an entirely different person. Because You can save people that way. Lord, I pray You would save some this morning, if they don't know Your Son. And for those who are saved, Lord, I pray they would rejoice as they see how they've been taken out of the spiritual darkness into light. Lord, thank you for Your grace in that. Thank you for Your mercy.

Lord, thank you for these stories we read about in the Gospel of John, that remind us of the mighty power of Your Son and how He goes after sinners, and He keeps going after them. He keeps going after them. He takes time to do that. May we learn from His example today and be compassionate.

Father as we come to the Lord's Table this morning, we pray You'll be glorified in it. Thank you for this memorial, this reminder of what Christ has done. And may He be lifted high here at Grace Fellowship today. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.