The Gospel of John: A Parable of Christian Conversion—From Darkness to Light

John 9:1-7

Last Sunday I delivered the first of several messages on this famous story found in John 9 when Jesus brings sight to a man born blind. The title of that message was The Works of God, and my focus was on what Jesus taught His disciples in His discourse and His example that we observed in vss. 1-7.

This morning, however, we will return to this story, in fact, we will return to the same 7 verses, with a different set of lenses. I would like to read this healing story again, but this time I would invite you to consider the parabolic value of this story as it pertains to Christian conversion. In doing so, we shall discover tremendous insight into how Jesus works to “bring sight to the blind;” and then next week we will observe what can be expected for those who “once were blind but now they see.” So, with no further delay, let us read together John 9:1-7:

As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” 3 Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. 4 We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. 5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” 6 Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud 7 and said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

My message this morning is entitled: A Parable of Christian Conversion-From Darkness to Light. In these 7 verses we will observe 1) the desperation of the human condition; 2) the sovereign work of God in salvation; and 3) our freedom to respond.

I. The Desperation of the Human Condition

As we return to the scene, we must once again remember what just took place in John 8. If you recall, in all of John 8, Jesus was in the Temple speaking to the Jews, and particularly the Jewish leaders and authorities. He was speaking to those who considered themselves to be religious and enlightened…these were the “good” people, the “clean” people, and those who were the best informed regarding religious matters. Ironically, when Jesus declared Himself to be “The Light of the World”…when He said, “Before Abraham was, I am,” those thought to be the most enlightened picked up stones to kill Jesus. The proud religious people wanted nothing more of “the Light of the World” than to snuff Him out!

Note now the irony and contrast of the man Jesus addresses in John 9. As we observed last Sunday, the blind beggar is outside of the Temple; he is considered unclean and excluded from worship in the temple. We learn from the disciples that many assume his blindness is God’s curse for his sin or that of his parents. And yet, as we shall see, it is here in this man trapped in darkness that the glory of God shall be revealed.

Arthur Pink comments on the contrast between John 8 and John 9, stating:

This is the central contrast pointed by these two chapters. In the former is the Light testing human responsibility; in the latter, the Light acting in sovereign mercy after the failure of human responsibility had been demonstrated. In the one we see the sin of man exposed, in the other we behold the grace of God displayed.
The contrast between those inside the Temple and the man outside the Temple is no accident. At the end of John 9 Jesus will say these words: “For judgment I have come into the world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.” Jesus is clearly not talking about physical eyesight…He is talking about seeing the Truth and being transformed by the Truth. Those inside the Temple who claimed to see were blinded to the Truth by their proud, self-righteousness, and hardened hearts. Again Arthur Pink observes:

“[John 8] furnishes us with a graphic but accurate picture of the character of the natural man the world over. The mind of the sinner is enmity against God, and he hates the Christ of God. He may be very religious, and left to himself, he may appear to be quite pious. But let the Light of God be turned upon him, let the bubble of his self-righteousness be punctured, let his awful depravity be exposed, let the claims of Christ be pressed upon him, and he is not only skeptical, but furious.”

This morning we will once again consider this man outside the Temple who does not see. He is a blind beggar; trapped in darkness since birth. He has no delusions of enlightenment or moral superiority. He is not preoccupied with his position, his wealth, or his status. He is a man of humble state; a man of ultimate dependence; a man who is…in every sense of the word…powerless to change his condition. Yet he is a man who lacks pretense. Unlike those inside the Temple, this man has no delusions of grandeur. His blindness cannot be disguised with fancy robes, titles, or advanced degrees. The man is a blind beggar—he knows it, and everyone knows it. There is no hiding.

Now, before we move on with the story, I want us to take a moment and observe the plight of the human condition. Based upon what we have read and the larger witness of scripture, we can make three observations about the human condition:

1) We are all “born blind.” According to the scriptures, our estrangement from God is an inherited condition. Paul sums up the human dilemma in Romans 3, “…all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, no not one.’ ‘Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.’ ‘The venom of asps is under their lips.’ ‘Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.’ ‘Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known.’ ‘There is no fear of God before their eyes.’ There is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Blindness…spiritual darkness…is not a learned trait. Nor should we think that some are born spiritually blind while others are born spiritually enlightened. In the spiritual realm, according to a biblical worldview, all human beings are born into the darkness of Adam’s sin…we are born into inherited blindness, and that leads me to my second observation:

2) We are powerless to “fix” our condition. The blind beggar represents our plight: there is no power in man to bring sight to one born blind. This is the reformed doctrine of total depravity. We simply do not have it in us to fix what is broken in us. Those who think they can achieve spiritual enlightenment through morality, intellectualism, or any other means remain just as blind.
as ever; yet, as we have observed, they are self-deceived and hostile toward the Light of the World. And that leads me to my third observation regarding our human dilemma:

3) There are two groups of people in the world: Those who are born blind yet insist that they can see; and those who are born blind who know they are blind. This is the contrast we observe between those in the temple in John 8 and the blind beggar who sits outside the temple in John 9. We see this contrast in the story of the two sons in Luke 15. We see this contrast in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector in Luke 18. We see the contrast of these two groups of people even to this day. Many of you are aware of our urban ministry partners such as The Healing House or Freedom Fire. In these ministries, people who are far from Christ regularly walk in off the streets who have come to the end of their rope. They are the homeless, the drug addicts, the prostitutes, the outcasts…and they have nothing to hide. They know their lives are a mess…they are quite aware of their blindness and quite willing to acknowledge the hopelessness of their condition. Contrast that description to those who are far from Christ yet find their way into a suburban church on any given Sunday. These are often people who are well dressed and appointed; they are well-educated; successful in business; leaders in their organizations; and generally pleased with their lives and standard of living.

Biblically we know that the suburban unbelievers are no less blind than the unbelieving addict or prostitute, for the scriptures tell us that none are “good”, not even one. But many of us who live in privilege and comfort hide our blindness quite well, don’t we? We actually believe that we are enlightened, “good” people—and I think it safe to say that we are those who are most likely to take offense at the notion that we are blind sinners in need of salvation, right? Biblically, we are all born blind… “no one is good, no not one.”

So…before we go any further, I invite you to find your place in the text. Are we those who are aware of our blindness and are without pretense about that? Or, are we those who deny our blindness and try to justify ourselves as those who can see just fine? This story demands that we find our place in the text…so be thinking about that as we turn to my second subheading:

II. The Sovereign Work of God

In this parable of Christian conversion, it is important to observe that the saving work of God is based upon God’s sovereignty, God’s initiative, and God’s election.

First, let us observe that Jesus elects to present Himself to all kinds of people trapped in darkness. Jesus comes first to those who are in denial of their blindness in John 8, and then to one who knows he is blind in John 9. I want to stress that in both cases, Jesus comes as one who is uninvited. Neither those within the Temple nor the blind beggar outside the Temple would think to track down Jesus and set an appointment! Jesus just appears in the Temple and begins to reveal Himself to the Jews in John 8, and Jesus stops and engages the blind man in John 9. Church: Jesus always comes to us; He does not wait for us to come to Him. Jesus tells Nicodemus in John 3, “For God so loved the world He gave His only begotten Son…” Paul writes in Galatians 4, “At just the right time, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. Salvation is always the sovereign work and initiative of God, and we see that here in our text.
As Jesus engages the man born blind, we see that Jesus spits on the ground, makes mud, and then anoints the man’s eye with the mud. Again, note that Jesus initiates the healing before any request is made. Even before the man could think to ask Jesus to heal him, Jesus initiates His healing work. This is always the case when it comes to sinful people bound in spiritual darkness. Our salvation is not ever going to depend on what we have done; we can only be saved by what Jesus has already accomplished on our behalf, amen? That said, let us now consider my third subheading:

**III. Our Freedom to Respond**

Though every aspect of God’s saving work is an expression of His initiative and sovereignty, we must observe that in both John 8 and John 9, those blind people Jesus came to save are free to either believe and trust in Him or not. In John 8, we saw those who were blind but proud reject the Light of the World. Jesus offered them living water for the thirst of their souls; He offered them His light; He offered them Himself—and they rejected Jesus. They would not yield. They even picked up stones to kill him.

Now, here in John 9, the blind beggar has also been given the offer of sight and salvation from the plight of his dark prison. The healing salve has already been placed upon his eyes, but then comes the invitation: “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam.”

The blind man has a choice to make. On the one hand, he can be offended that this man named Jesus thinks his blindness is a problem that needs fixing. He can be appalled by the arrogance of this man who thinks He is so powerful as to reverse the natural condition he was born into. He can be indignant that this man applied spit and mud to his unseeing eyes without any invitation or permission to do so. He might also be intimidated by the Jewish authorities who had made it illegal and punishable for anyone to confess Jesus as the Christ. At this moment when Jesus invites the man to get up, go, and wash…there are many reasons why this man might respond, “Thanks, but no thanks. I don’t need your mud-pies; I don’t have any interest in what you have to say; I’m good…leave me alone.”

On the other hand, the blind beggar has no doubt heard rumor of this man named Jesus for some time now. He has no doubt heard the stories of the man bound to a mat for 38 years who now walks the streets of Jerusalem thanks to Jesus. He has heard the stories of the signs and wonders performed by this carpenter’s son from Nazareth. No doubt the man thinks to himself, “What do I have to lose? I am a blind beggar. My life is and has always been utter darkness. I have no pride, no hope, no plan B. This man Jesus has healed others, and now he has applied something to my eyes, and he has ordered me to go and wash. I shall go and do as He says. Who knows what will happen? Perhaps my life shall be changed forever; perhaps not. But I will go, nonetheless.”

Church, this man’s response is a beautiful picture of faith in response to God’s sovereign work of salvation in Jesus Christ. Faith is going when our Lord says to go, believing that Jesus can be trusted based upon what He has already done! Faith compels the blind man to obey the
commands of Christ BEFORE he can see. But notice: faith does not heal the man. Jesus healed
the man by grace alone. Jesus initiated the relationship; Jesus applied the healing salve; it is the
power of Jesus that will transform this man from one who is blind to one who sees! But faith is
yet required for the gift of sight to be received by the blind beggar. If the man does not get up
and wash in the pool of Siloam as an expression of his faith, all that Jesus has done for him will
remain unclaimed and his blindness will remain. Jesus will not force the blind man to see
against his will. Jesus does all the work of saving; but the blind man must respond with faith in
order for the work of Jesus to become a transforming reality in his life.

Thanks be to God, the blind beggar gets up and goes to the pool of Siloam, where he washes and
discovers that he can see. For the first time in his whole life, he can see! He is a changed
man…forever…and all that follows from this point in the story beautifully describes what can be
expected when those who were once blind receive their sight through the sovereign grace of our
Lord Jesus Christ. That will be our subject for next week’s message, so I encourage you to
spend some time in the text and come ready to look at how this story reveals what we can all
anticipate as those who have been given sight by Jesus.

For now, let us take a moment and internalize this story as it applies to our lives and the lives of
those around us. Let me begin with a few questions.

1) Are you prepared to accept and embrace a biblical worldview regarding the plight of
humanity? For many of us, we struggle embracing this notion of total depravity. We like to
believe that people are inherently good; but the Bible says that we are inherently fallen. Listen:
the Bible helps us to understand that all human beings are inherently VALUABLE because all
human beings bear God’s image (Gen 1-2). This is what leads us to think that people are
inherently good. However, people are not so much “good” as they are brilliant, gifted, beautiful,
creative, and intelligent…just like the God who made them. Sadly, the image of God that can be
observed in every human being is corrupted by sin (Gen 3), which leads all of us to be conniving,
selfish, and, at times, ruthless creatures! Only a biblical worldview accounts for the way we
actually are; but that biblical worldview demands that we acknowledge that “no one is
good…not even one.” We are all born into spiritual blindness; and we all need a Savior who can
liberate us and deliver us from darkness to light. If you believe and embrace a biblical
worldview regarding humanity, you are well on your way to understanding the Gospel’s power
in your life and the lives of those around you.

2) Are you aware of your own darkness and spiritual blindness? It seems to me that most people
are not aware of their own darkness and spiritual blindness. Most of us are pretty proud, and we
are easily offended when someone points out our dark side. Most of us are pretty good at hiding.
We wear the mask, we play the part, but the darkness remains…and left unchecked, the darkness
within us is growing. This story in John 9 challenges us to identify with the blind beggar…you
get that, right? The blind beggar is “savable.” The blind beggar has the humility to receive the
gift of sight as he responds in simple faith and obedience to Jesus. The blind beggar is the one in
whom the works of God will be put on display. John 8 and 9 then beg the question: are you
blind but in denial like those in the Temple? Or are you blind and willing to admit your condition
like the blind beggar outside the Temple? The first rejects the Light of the World; the second
receives Him and experiences liberation from darkness to light!
3) Do you understand and acknowledge that the healing salve has already been placed upon your unseeing eyes? It’s true. Everything that need be done for your healing and salvation has already been accomplished. Jesus has already come to you and me. He has already identified our blindness and placed the mud on our eyes when He atoned for our sins on a Roman cross. Our victory over sin and death has already been accomplished when Jesus rose from the dead on the third day and ascended into heaven where He sits at the right hand of the Father, interceding for His Church! All that is left to be done is for you to get up and “wash in the pool of Siloam!” All that is left is for you to respond in faith…to go as Jesus has commanded, that you might return seeing! There is no need for striving. There is no prerequisite of “being good enough.” There is no expectation that you will “see” well enough on your own to overcome your blindness. Jesus has already seen you, come to you, and placed the healing salve upon your eyes. The question is, how will you respond? Will you arise in faith, trusting in what Jesus has accomplished on your behalf, so that you might participate in the light that He has already offered you? Or will you reject Him? Will you choose darkness because that is what you are accustomed to, even though Jesus warns us that we will die in our sin? You have a choice to make…we all do.

4) Finally, for those of us who know what it is to be delivered out of darkness, let us remember this story as we step out into the hurting world around us. Every person we meet is one whom Jesus died to save and to bring into the light of His loving mercy. All have been born into spiritual darkness; but remember that those who know they are in darkness…those who are at the end of their rope and no longer attempt to hide the darkness within…those are the people of whom Jesus said, “It is in them that the works of God might be displayed!” Look for those who know they are blind and introduce them to Jesus! Tell them of all that our Lord has done to bring sight to the blind and liberation to the oppressed. Walk with them through the hope of the Gospel and challenge them to rise up in faith to do the Lord’s bidding, trusting in what He has already accomplished on their behalf. This is the essence of our mission at Colonial: to be the light of Christ in a hurting culture so that the lost are found! So that the blind receive sight…so that the works of God would be displayed in us and bring glory to the Father! As the risen Jesus charged the Apostle Paul in Acts 26 to go and share the Gospel, “to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’

I would close by recalling the great story of John Newton; an Englishman who was contrary and prone for trouble since childhood. He deserted from the Royal Navy as a young man, was caught and flogged. He finally found work on a slave ship called the Greyhound; and it was on that ship, in a wild storm in 1747, that Newton cried out to God to save him. Though his cry was sincere, Newton’s transformation took place slowly over the course of many years. He would go on to captain several slave ships, though he did his best to care for the crew as well as the slaves in his charge. Eventually, Newton could no longer stomach the horrors of the slave trade. The incongruence of his faith and his lifestyle led him to leave his career and eventually enter into the ministry. He wrote the work, Thoughts on the African Slave Trade to help William Wilberforce’s effort to end the trade; and of course, he wrote many hymns including the most famous of them all, Amazing Grace. Church, even the worst of human beings…even those most corrupted by the darkness of sin…can be saved through the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus
Christ. John Newton understood this truth, and he dedicated the rest of his life to proclaiming the Gospel, even well into his last years of life. He knew what it was to walk in darkness; and he knew what it was to be saved by grace! Let us conclude by singing together the first verse of that famous hymn, *Amazing Grace*!

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now I am found,
Was blind but now I see.

Let’s pray.