The Gospel of John: *The Joys and Trials of a New Believer*  
John 9:8-23

Last week we observed that this amazing story of Jesus healing a man born blind in John 9:1-7 is not only an event that took place; the story also serves as a parable of Christian conversion. The blind beggar trapped in darkness represents our human condition: because of the fallen condition of humanity, we are all those “born blind.” None of us are able to see on our own…we are beggars in need of healing; we are condemned and without hope…in desperate need for forgiveness; we need a Savior…we need Jesus. In the story we see that Jesus comes to us long before we would ever think to come to Him. Jesus chooses to heal those who know they are blind of His own accord; but then he invites those trapped in darkness to respond in faith; and as we respond in faith, the healing becomes a reality such that we are transformed from those trapped in darkness to those who now walk in His light!

There is nothing so powerful and dramatic as this conversion from darkness to light…it’s a gamechanger in every sense of the word. This morning we will read further into this story and observe what can be expected for those who have been healed and delivered out of darkness by our Lord. Our text is John 9:8-23, so please stand and let us read the Word of the Lord.

8 The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” 9 Some said, “It is he.” Others said, “No, but he is like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” 10 So they said to him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” 11 He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ So I went and washed and received my sight.” 12 They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. 14 Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 15 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.” 16 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. 17 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.” 18 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 19 and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” 20 His parents answered, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. 21 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.” 22 (His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.) 23 Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

My message this morning is entitled, *Trials of a New Believer*, and it will fall under three subheadings: 1) A New Identity of Joy; 2) Disappointing Resistance; and 3) The Necessary Testing of Faith.

**I. A New Identity of Joy**

Church, it is one thing to hear Jesus proclaim in John 8:12, “I am the Light of the World! Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” It is yet quite another thing to picture this man in John 9, blind from birth, now seeing for the first time. Forgive me if I linger here, but I fear that too many of us are ruined by overfamiliarity with this story; so, let us pause to imagine the daily existence and self-image of this blind beggar prior to his encounter with Jesus. From his earliest memories, there has been naught but familiar, despairing darkness. Though the sun has shone upon his face, he has never gazed upon its
brilliance. He has heard the voice of his mother and felt the tenderness of her touch, but he has never looked upon her face.

We must remember that one who is born blind does not even “hear” in the same way that seeing people do, or even as those unfortunate souls who once saw but later lost their sight. When we who have ever had sight hear words, those words create images in our imagination that are generally congruent with the way things are in the physical world. This man, however, has never seen anything, so the words or descriptions or ideas that he hears do not correspond with images in his mind that are congruent with the way things actually are. The world of truth, so dependent upon light and sight, has been all but inaccessible to him since he first breathed air.

Remember also the question of the disciples, uttered within hearing distance of the beggar: “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” No doubt the beggar had heard such musings his whole life, a never-ending reminder that his pathetic condition was surely God’s curse upon a sinful and condemned soul. Is this not a man without hope? A man reduced to poverty in every sense of the word? A man scorned by society and even worse…a man cursed by God.

So imagine, if you will, a day like any other day for the beggar. The man begins his day in darkness; dependent upon his parents for a meager breakfast before making his way, cane in hand, down the familiar path to that place assigned to beggars somewhere near the temple gates. There he will once again bear the scorn and shame of his profession in hopes of some small act of compassion from those coming to worship in God’s temple…a temple he is not allowed to enter, dedicated to a God he has clearly offended.

However, on this day, the blind beggar discerns, through his keen sense of hearing, a stir within the Temple courts. The angry voices of proud, religious authorities can be heard shouting accusations of blasphemy. It is a murderous accusation; and if valid, the one accused is in mortal danger of being stoned right there on the spot. The blind beggar has little doubt regarding the identity of the accused…it could be no other than the Nazarene, a man called Jesus, who has all but eclipsed the Feast of Tabernacles with His claims to be the giver of living water and the Light of the World. No doubt the beggar has heard the rumors and murmuring from countless souls this week as they passed by his station, oblivious to his presence.

But, curiously, just as soon as the angry shouting begins, the voices in the temple courts begin to complain in confusion that the accused has disappeared from their sight. And then, just moments later, the beggar shocked to hear the man Jesus speaking quite close to where he is stationed. Jesus is answering the question that has been asked so often about the blind man…a damning question regarding his sin-cursed condition; but amazingly, the Nazarene replies with words the blind man could have never fathomed: “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him…As long as I am in the world, I am the Light of the World.” And then, in an instant, He feels the hands of the Nazarene placing mud upon his eyes, and he hears the quiet invitation: “Go please, and wash in the pool of Siloam.”

What is this strange feeling; this beating of the heart that feels as though it might explode? The blind man has no word, no precedent for what is now taking place in his soul…only later will he
be able to describe it using the appropriate word, in the Hebrew it was *tikvah*…in the English the word is hope.

Could it be that the works of God might be displayed in him? Could it be that this man named Jesus has the power to do what no man had ever done—to bring sight to one born blind? The blind beggar does not hesitate. Reaching for his cane he sets out for the pool of Siloam. He needs no guide; it is a destination he knows only too well. Water drawn from Siloam during the Feast was thought to be Messianic water…the mere thought makes his heart beat even faster. As he stumbles toward the pool on a mission of obedience to Jesus, normalcy is all around him. Shopkeepers are selling their wares; children are shouting and running in the streets; it is business as usual…but not so with the beggar. He has been touched by Jesus; he has been instructed to go; and now he walks even faster…there can be no doubt that whatever awaits him at the pool of Siloam will determine his destiny. But even now, there is already something different about this man…there is hope coursing through his veins; there is the possibility that God has not cursed him but has perhaps chosen him for his glory…that’s what the man Jesus just said! And then, at long last, he arrives. Though a crowd is no doubt huddled around the clear waters, they quickly get out of his way…fearful of being touched by the unclean beggar. Then, as the cold water hits his face and mud falls away from his eyes, the beggar is brought to his knees by a sensation he has never known. Light now streams into his brain; color explodes into his consciousness with such force that he is overwhelmed with knowledge, insight, and truth about the world around him. Prior to this day he had only notions of things, clouded in darkness and ambiguity; but now he *has eyes to see*, and his entire perspective of reality is forever changed!

No doubt the young man, abandoning the cane so worn by his calloused hands, races home—eager to share this unbelievable news! He can’t wait to SEE his parents; he can’t wait to SEE his siblings! When he arrives home, before even entering their small hole of a house, his neighbors stare at him in disbelief. We read in vs. 8: The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” Some said, “It is he.” Other said, “No, but he is like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.”

Church, are you there? Can you feel the power of this man’s transformation? Can you feel his anticipation? He is a new man! He has been healed; he has been changed; he has been delivered from darkness to light! Nothing will ever be the same again; it is a new day, and all he can think to do is to share his joy with those he loves! But notice…the unbelieving world already looks upon him with skepticism. They look at each other and say, “There has to be some kind of logical explanation…this can’t be the same man who was just this morning sitting at the temple gates as a blind beggar. Look at his face…the similarity is striking, but it can’t be the same man, right? People don’t actually change like that. Nobody born blind has ever received their sight…this can’t be the same man, although he insists that he is.”

Look here, Church, and observe the dual identity of the new believer. He is the same man…a man born blind… a man reduced to begging…but at the very same time, he is a new man with a new identity. Though his name remains the same; though his face remains unchanged; his identity is altered: he is still “the one born blind;” but now he is also “the one delivered from darkness to light!” He is the same man; and yet he is a new man!
Nobody captures the dual identity of a new believer like the Apostle Paul in Galatians 2:20: I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

It will take many years before this newly delivered man will be able to articulate his new sense of identity like the Apostle Paul. He will fail miserably to put words to his experience and his new identity. He will wrestle to understand and negotiate the daily tension of the old man who still wrestles with darkness and yet is being transformed day by day into the new man who lives by faith in Christ, the Light of Life!

For now, our friend here in John 9 only knows what he has experienced: this morning he was blind; but now…but now for the first time in his whole life, he sees! He will never again be accurately described as a blind beggar…his eyes have been opened, and he is forever changed, he has a new identity: an identity of JOY!

Now, before we move on…let me address the elephant in the room. I know many of us grew up in a Christian home; we’ve been going to church our whole lives; we love Jesus, but we lack this kind of a dramatic testimony. We might struggle to identify some dramatic moment when we were delivered from darkness to light; so when we read this story, we question whether our relationship with Jesus is legit since it looks so different from what we see here in John 9 or in comparison to other dramatic conversion stories that we’ve heard throughout the years. Let me address this concern for just a moment. First, let us be grateful for Christian nurturing and our Christian families who honored God by teaching us His precepts and helping us to know Jesus. The Bible instructs us to raise our children to fear the Lord and to honor His precepts. How profoundly different would our country and world be today if even a simple majority of families were to faithfully raise their children to know and fear the Lord! I was raised in such a family, and my family has been a strength and an encouragement to my faith my whole life.

That said, (and I speak now from my own experience as one raised in a loving, Christian home) even those raised in the finest of Christian homes who have attended the church forever should have cause to rejoice that the Lord has delivered us from darkness…for we are all born blind; we all have the cancer of sin. I am a lifelong Christian, but I can easily identify several instances of where the Lord has delivered me out of a horrible prison of darkness. Listen: If the darkness and insidious nature of our sinful condition remains foreign to us—if we have never had a time of sincere and broken repentance—if we cannot identify any habitual sin or evil that the Lord has delivered us from—then, in all honesty, we are those who should indeed have cause to inspect our souls and to ask the Lord to show us all that is dark and offensive in our lives. In other words, every sincere Christian should, at some point, be able to point to the darkness that Jesus delivered you from by His grace: be that your battle with lust, your habitual coveting, or your spiritual pride. All of us have very real darkness within us; that should come as no surprise to those who have a relationship with the Light of the World.

Now, there are some of you who do not relate at all with this story in John 9—you have no identity of joy—you have no story of deliverance from darkness to light. I implore you: do not put off this prescription for another day. Look seriously and honestly upon the dark stain of your sin. Set aside your self-justification. Set aside your skepticism and be honest about your condition. Your condition is critical; your diagnosis is terminal. Paul writes in Romans 6 that the
wages of sin is death. But there is hope still for us all. Call upon the name of the Lord, call upon Jesus in desperation, and look to the cross and the empty tomb. Our Savior comes even now for those who will place their faith in His saving work, and it is His desire to deliver you from the prison of your darkness to the liberating light of His grace!

Now, there are others of us who relate well with this healed beggar. We remember what it was to live in utter darkness; and even now we weep in remembrance of that day when Jesus delivered us into His perfect light! This is the joy of the new believer: “I once was lost, but now I am found. I was blind, but now I see!” We have a new identity…an identity of joy! I would spend the rest of the day, and perhaps every day for the next week simply meditating upon this identity of joy, but let us now continue to my second subheading:

**II. Disappointing Resistance**

One of the most remarkable observations we can make in this story is that NO ONE, apart from the man himself, rejoices that the one born blind has received his sight…not even one. Where we might expect to find stories of parties and celebrations, we instead read of interrogations and skepticism. Let us consider first the questions of the neighbors in vss. 10-12:

10 So they said to him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” 11 He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ So I went and washed and received my sight.” 12 They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

We should not think harshly of the neighbors. Though they fail to celebrate with the newly healed man, their questions are reasonable given their shock, right? They ask, “How then were your eyes opened?” They are interested in the mechanics, the process, the medicine that might account for this apparent miracle. It does not even occur to them to ask the question, WHO? The healed man gives a simple, honest answer, “‘The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ So I went and washed and received my sight.” 12 They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

I want to make two quick observations about this initial conversation with the nosy neighbors. First, note that the healed man knows little about Jesus other than he is a man who made mud, anointed his eyes, and sent him to wash. The man will come to know more about Jesus as time goes on, but when asked, the man simply reports the facts…giving Jesus the credit for what He has done. Later on, the man will come to appreciate more about who Jesus is…but he doesn’t have that kind of “light” just yet, right? So his testimony simply states, “This is what Jesus did for me.”

Many people who call themselves Christians have a story about coming out of darkness into the light. Many of us have a “before” and “after” story, but we don’t feel very qualified to answer every theological question thrown our way. So, consequently, we go private with our faith. If asked, we will say something to the effect of: “My faith is very important to me. My faith helps me to deal with hard times. I am very private about my faith; but I believe in a higher power and I believe in the power of prayer.” But did you notice what was missing in that testimony? Did you catch it? We never mentioned HIS NAME…JESUS! Why? Well, many of us have learned that it is socially acceptable to talk about “faith” or even to muse on the existence of a god; but to mention the name JESUS…to tell people what Jesus has done for us…to confess Jesus as our only hope of deliverance from darkness to light, will likely lead to some conflict, right. “God” is
general and safe in our culture; but Jesus is entirely too specific and divisive. Listen Church, let us not forget what Jesus said in Matthew 10:32-33: 32 So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, 33 but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven. If we are Christians, if we have been delivered out of darkness into His glorious light, then we are, by definition, called by His name, saved by His name, and empowered by His name. The testimony of a believer, like this healed man in John 9, should always feature Jesus as the main actor, amen?

Here is my second observation: when asked a question about Jesus that was beyond the man’s ability to answer, he simply responds, “I do not know.” The former beggar does not attempt to speculate or say more than he actually knows, and that is a good lesson for us all. Too often we try to pontificate or speculate about theological mysteries that are beyond the light God has given us. Better for us to admit what we do not know than to “fake it” and speculate without knowledge. When giving your testimony, it is completely acceptable and advisable to simply share what you do know and admit what you don’t.

Now, we read next that the well-intended neighbors take the young man to be interviewed by the Pharisees. We can only assume that they are looking for an expert opinion and interpretation regarding this dramatic healing. John reports: 13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. 14 Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 15 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.” 16 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. 17 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.”

Church, we have here yet again another “episode of missing the point!” Note that the Pharisees do not even comment on the remarkable miracle that just took place in their city. There is no worship of God; there is no call for celebration; again…there is only skepticism. Why? Because these men have already made a decision to reject Jesus; so their first order of business is to reject the miracle as well. These legalistic religious leaders are looking for reasons to discredit Jesus, so when they ask to hear again the story of how the blind man received his sight, they are looking for opportunities to entrap Jesus with their Sabbath codes. Notice, however, how the former beggar tailors his answer: And he said to them, “He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see.” Can you see how the healed man is trying to protect Jesus from the Pharisees? He doesn’t lie, but he leaves out a bunch of information: 1) he doesn’t mention Jesus by name; 2) he leaves out the part about Jesus making the mud (another breach of the sabbath; 3) and he leaves out the part about Jesus ordering him to wash at Siloam (causing the beggar to sin by breaking the Sabbath). Alas, even given the beggars careful testimony, many of the Pharisees have heard all they need to hear to immediately conclude: “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” Other Pharisees (likely Nicodemus, right?) disagree, saying: “How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?” And there was a division among them.

Let us pause and recognize what we have observed previously in our journey through the gospel: Jesus causes division. In Luke 12:51 Jesus states, “Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, division.” Church, we must remember that Jesus is the Great Divider because truth always reveals untruth. Light reveals darkness. And here again we notice that Jesus has brought division even amongst the Pharisees. Don’t be disillusioned by Jesus the Divider: that has to happen to separate the wheat from the chaff, right? Now, the Pharisees redirect the
questioning back to the former beggar and ask: “What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?” He said, “He is a prophet.”

Notice now, when asked, that the healed man has received more light from the Lord. He comprehends that anyone who had the power to bring sight to the blind must be an agent of God; a prophet who speaks the Word the Lord and does great signs and wonders in His name. So he now refers to Jesus not just as “a man,” but as a prophet!

OK: before we move on, let us recognize the disappointing resistance this man receives from the most religious people in town. These highly esteemed Pharisees, supposedly so devoted to God, are very dismissive and even resentful of the man born blind and suspect of the work of Jesus. This meeting had to be pretty disillusioning for the new believer, and this kind of disappointing resistance is often disillusioning for new believers even to this day. But notice: this kind of disbelieving skepticism and resistance is normal…it is what we can expect from our neighbors and even respected leaders in our community when we try to share about our life-changing encounter with Jesus. This kind of resistance and skepticism will constantly test our new faith, and that leads me to my third subheading:

III. The Necessary Testing of Faith

Many of us remember when we were delivered from darkness to light. We remember that day, and we remember our excitement to share our experience with others, particularly our friends and family, right? And what happened? They looked at us like we were crazy, right? In fact, for many of us, the next few weeks were some of the hardest weeks of our lives as we discovered that even our own family members were unaccepting, critical, or even downright hostile to our new relationship with Jesus. These times of disillusioning rejection by even those closest to us serve as a testing of our faith, and the Bible is not silent to this season of testing. Look at what happens next in our story:

18 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 19 and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” 20 His parents answered, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. 21 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.” 22 (His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.) 23 Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

The young man’s parents are called in by the Pharisees to verify the former blind man’s story. The officials ask, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” The parents are clearly intimidated. As much as they love their son, they have not yet met Jesus, so they don’t even know what to think of their son’s story. Clearly they are familiar with the story of “how it is that he now sees;” they know that Jesus of Nazareth healed their son. But when asked by the religious authorities, the parents are not willing to invoke the name of Jesus because doing so might cause them to be excommunicated from the Synagogue. So, they acknowledge only that the man is their son, and that he was born blind, but then they try to protect themselves by pointing back to their son, and they say, “He is of age; ask him.”
To be “of age” in the ancient Jewish community meant that he was at least 13 years of age. Now, we don’t know how old this young man was, but I can’t imagine it felt to affirming to hear your parents essentially say, “Let the boy answer for himself and reap the consequences for whatever he says. We’re not willing to risk our necks to be associated with our son or the man who delivered him from blindness.” That’s sad, right? It is sad…but not surprising.

Church, remember the words of our Lord in Luke 12:53: 53 They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

Once again, the New Testament is not naïve or silent about what can be expected for those who have been delivered by Christ. Our new faith will be tested. Our families may turn against us. Even the most religious people in town might question or diminish our testimony. I have seen more than one new Christian crumble under this season of disillusionment and testing because it so caught them off guard. So don’t be caught off guard! If we take God’s Word seriously, we should not be surprised by the testing of our faith. The Apostle James speaks directly to this season of testing with these words: Count it all joy, my brothers, 3 when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. 6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.

The Apostle Peter writes: 7 These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.

As we pick up this story next week, we’ll observe that at these interrogations and times of testing are only growing the resolve of the man delivered from darkness…and that is as it should be. Listen: if we are those who have been delivered out of darkness, our sole governing reliance should be on Christ, and Christ alone, amen? Do not look to human beings…not even your only family members…for your sense of well-being and affirmation. When Jesus calls you into His light, your allegiance is to Jesus, whatever the cost…that’s part of the deal. Now, let us also remember that Jesus called us to walk with one another in the fellowship of the believers. Christianity is not a solo sport; so one way that we find strength to endure in the seasons of testing is to lean upon other believers and to carry each other’s burdens (Galatians 6:2). This is why being part of a local church is critical…we will all be tested and we need Christian fellowship to endure those times.

Alright, that’s all the time we have for today. We will pick up the story here in John 9 next Sunday, but until then, I want to leave you with a few challenges for the week.

1) Take some time this week and thank God for your testimony, whatever it is. Take time to remember how Jesus delivered you out of spiritual blindness, out of the oppression of your addiction or your battle with depression or whatever source of oppression you were bound up in. We would all do well to remember and give thanks…for apart from Jesus, we would all be prisoners of darkness, amen?
2) Trust God to speak the name of Jesus to another person this week. Share what you know and have experienced of His goodness, and be prepared to admit what you don’t know.

3) Embrace the testing of your faith and reflect upon how your faith has grown through seasons of testing in the past.

4) Ask Jesus for even greater light. Many of us have become content in our dim perspective regarding our faith in Christ. Many of us have limited light when it comes to the ministry of reconciliation that God has entrusted to His Church. In other words, we don’t know much and we like it that way! I challenge you, Church, to ask God for more. Ask our Father to increase your light, that you might see even more clearly how you can bear witness to a hurting world and serve as the Light of Christ. That is a prayer that pleases God, and Lord knows we need more light in our lives and in this dark world, amen?

Will you pray with me?