

The True Light Shines

John 9:1-41

Preached by Minister Jason Tarn at HCC on May 20, 2012

Introduction

- ❖ **Have you ever heard someone call Christianity a “crutch for the weak”?** It's a popular way to criticize the Christian faith, to call it a crutch for weak-willed, emotionally-frail people who can't cope with the difficulties of life without turning to a transcendent god who gives a higher purpose to their pain.
- ❖ Richard Dawkins, for example, once compared a religious believer to a child with a dummy in its mouth (that is, a lollipop). He said, *“I do not think it a very dignified or respect-worthy posture for an adult to go around sucking a dummy for comfort.”*
 - What he means is that, like a crutch, religious belief is for the weak and childish. He's implying that any self-respecting adult should realize how foolish it is to look for comfort in the supernatural instead of just facing the hardships of life like a grownup.
- ❖ *So is Dawkins right? Is Christianity a crutch for the weak?* If you ask me, I'd say, “Yes!” And then I'd follow up with another question, “What's so bad about a crutch?” Why do we so quickly assume a crutch is something inferior?
 - If you've ever twisted your ankle, you were probably dying for a crutch. The last time I twisted my ankle I was on crutches for two weeks. And at no point in time did I (or the people around me) consider those crutches a bad thing.
- ❖ So if a crutch is normally considered precious for those who have need of it, then *why does a crutch suddenly become something bad when applied to Christianity?* **The obvious reason is that some don't see a need for Christianity, for Christ.** They're under the impression that they're not crippled. If you think you're strong and able-bodied, then, of course, relying on a crutch to get around would seem useless, even foolish.
- ❖ Jesus told us that people will respond to him in this way. He described himself as a Great Physician, but he said those who think they're well see no need for him (Mk. 2:17). And likewise, **in today's passage, he reveals he is the Light of the World who opens the eyes of the blind, but those who think they're already seeing would think they have no need of him.** If you think you're already living in the light, then obviously you would ignore the call of one who promises to rescue you out of darkness.
- ❖ Friends, this passage illustrates the sharp contrast between two types of people in this world. Not between the seeing and the blind. But between two kinds of blind people – those who think can see AND those who actually know they're blind. It's the latter who get their eyes opened by Jesus. **In other words, everyone is crippled and in desperate need of a precious crutch like Jesus, but only some have their blind eyes opened to see this reality.**
- ❖ Our passage actually ends with a great role reversal. Those who pride themselves in their ability to see spiritual truths end up blind as a bat, adamantly opposed to Jesus. While the the beggar, who knows he's blind, ends up with his eyes wide open, identifying himself as a disciple of Jesus (9:27) falling on his face in worship (9:38).

- That's where I want all of us to be by the end of this service. That's why I prayed for God to come and do this. Only he can open our eyes to see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ (2 Cor. 4:4).
- ❖ So with that end in mind, I've divided our passage into two sections. [I decided to cut my third point.] In each, we'll see an illustration of how Jesus functions as the Light of the World 1) in illuminating suffering and 2) in exposing self-righteousness – both of which lead us to see our great need for him.

Illuminating Human Suffering

- ❖ First, we see Jesus shining his light into this world **1) to illuminate human suffering**. In other words, he opens our eyes to see that the suffering we go through in life is not the consequence of cruel fate or the punishment of a vindictive God. Rather it's the outworking of a good providence.
 - Start with me at v1. The last chapter ended with Jesus leaving the temple grounds after offending many with his teaching to the point some were ready to stone him (8:59). *“As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”*
- ❖ So here we have a poor, blind beggar sitting outside the temple gates, seeking alms from pious worshippers going in and out of the temple. We know from the text that he was a regular, a familiar face, and everyone knew he was born blind.
 - Now in v2, Jesus' disciples make the assumption, common in their day, that this man's congenital defect must be attributable to a specific sin committed either by the man (prenatally while in the womb) or by his parents prior to his birth.
- ❖ *Why would they come to that conclusion?* Well in those days, the Jews wrestled with the theological problem of suffering. Now it was a given in Scripture that all suffering, in a general sense, is a result of sin. You can trace it all back to Genesis 3.
 - But the theological problem had to do with individual cases of suffering. ***Everyone suffers, but why does one sinful person suffer more than another sinful person?***
- ❖ Their answer? **It must be that the one who suffers more has sinned more.** That is, the bigger the suffering you have implies the bigger the sinner you must be.
 - **So they assumed that every instance of human suffering can be traced back to a specific instance of human sin.** In other words, they tried to draw a straight line (a simplistic line) between your sin and your suffering.
- ❖ **Now granted there are places in the Bible where such a line is drawn.** Consider Miriam's opposition to Moses and the leprosy that afflicted her as a result (Num. 12:10) or what happened to Ananias and Sapphira when they lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-10). Even earlier in chapter 5, when he healed the invalid, Jesus suggested that the man's suffering was a direct result of some pattern of sin in his life (5:14).

- ❖ We see this principle work itself out in our day. If you consistently abuse your body with alcohol, then it's no surprise if one day you're suffering with a weak liver. If you're a pack-a-day smoker and one day you come down with lung cancer, then draw a straight line between the two. And this principle is not just limited to physical sickness. If you're known to be a harsh and abrasive person, then there is a reason to suggest *that* is why you're suffering with broken relationships and loneliness. Sometimes there is a direct line of causality.
- ❖ **But then again, Scripture makes it clear that we cannot absolutize this principle in every case.** The line between sin and suffering is usually neither direct nor straight, so identifying a clear line of causality is often next to impossible. **So not every sickness, not every trial, not every tragedy can be traced back to a specific sin in your life.**
 - In fact, the book of Job was written to challenge this very assumption. Job's "friends" kept telling him to repent of the sin that is causing his great suffering, but we're told, in chapter one, that such a sin does not exist.
- ❖ But unfortunately this kind of theology still exists today in popular religion. **Some people live in constant fear of breaking God's rules lest they be visited by some catastrophe or punishment.** As a young believer, I used to think every stubbed toe, every twisted ankle, was God's subtle way of getting me back for some sin.
 - So armed with a theology no more sophisticated than that, the disciples conclude that such a big suffering like being born blind must have resulted from a really big sin. *So who is to blame? The man or his parents?*
- ❖ Listen to Jesus' answer. He completely flips that kind of thinking on its head. **v3 – "Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.""** Do you see what just happened? **The disciples look at this man's blindness and they see divine punishment and look to blame. But Jesus looks and sees divine purpose and looks to praise.**
 - Contrary to popular thought, this poor beggar was not being punished all these years with blindness. **Rather, for all these years he was being prepared! Prepared for this very moment that the wondrous works of God might be displayed in his life.**
 - It's as if this blind man's suffering was a stage upon which the principle actor of history – God himself – could perform and demonstrate his almighty power for all the world to see. This suffering was an opportunity for God to be glorified in his life.
- ❖ **Friends, God knows that when you experience any kind of suffering, your first impulse is to want to know "why".** *Why is this happening to me? Why was I born this way? Why was my kid born this way? Why did I get sick? Why did I lose this job? Why did the relationship end?*
 - We want to be able to draw direct lines of causality to satisfy our questions and doubts. We want to know who to blame. But life is rarely that simple. **Rarely is there only one, clear, direct line between a particular cause and suffering.**

- More likely there are a multitude of causes and reasons for why things happened the way they did. Yes, some of them are your fault. But some of them are not. Yet all of them are so jumbled together that it's next to impossible to trace a direct line.
- ❖ **Picture the many jumbled strands that make up the underside of an intricately woven tapestry.** Corrie Ten Boom, who famously endured the Nazi concentration camps, told us to imagine life like a tapestry. If you were to watch a tapestry being woven from the underside, you would only see a chaotic mess of tangle threads.
 - You would have no idea why the weaver would make such an unintelligible thing. **But once the weaver is done and turns it over, you finally see how every single thread was necessary to form the beautiful image that is the tapestry.**
- ❖ Likewise, God is weaving a multitude of causes and reasons together that result in the suffering you're going through right now. **Trying to make sense of it all is like trying to figure out a tapestry from the underside alone.**
 - Jesus' point is that from God's perspective, from the topside, it all makes sense and it is quite beautiful. And if you're a believer, one day you'll have the privilege of standing by his side looking down at the tapestry that is your life.
- ❖ Now every so often, like in this blind man's case, God will give an advanced peek. **He'll give you a glimpse at his mysterious, yet good, purpose behind your pain.** But then again, many times he doesn't. But even if you're left wondering for the rest of your earthly life why certain things happened the way they did, **rest assured that you have a good and sovereign Weaver in heaven who makes no mistakes.** He never weaves a careless thread. Every suffering, every pain, was necessary to form the beautiful, glorious tapestry that is your life.
- ❖ But of course, you won't see the tapestry as beautiful or glorious unless the eyes of your heart are opened. It won't matter if God gives you a peek of the topside if you remain in your blindness. You'll just despise and reject it.
 - Just consider the Pharisees in our story. They get a glimpse. They get to see the works of God displayed in this blind man's life and yet they despise and reject it. *Why?* Because they're eyes are still blinded by self-righteousness.

Exposing Human Self-Righteousness

- ❖ This leads to our second point. Jesus functions as the Light of the World by shining his light **2) to expose human self-righteousness in our hearts.** In this section, we'll move a little faster as I read through our passage and interject in a few places to make some observations.
- ❖ Start back at v3, “[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.”*

- Here Jesus doesn't mean he stops being the light of the world once he ascends back to heaven. He means that his light shines brightest during his earthly ministry while he is present in body.
- ❖ But Jesus is mainly emphasizing the urgency he feels to fulfill his earthly ministry. To complete all that the Father sent him to do before "night" comes, a reference to his crucifixion looming just beyond the horizon.
- ❖ Continue on in v6, "[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. [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."*
- ❖ The temple goers were so used to seeing this blind man begging by the gates that they can't believe their own eyes. Some conclude this must be another man who simply bears a striking resemblance, but the beggar insists, "*I am the man*".
 - **Questions usually come up in regards to the way Jesus performed this healing, namely wondering why Jesus used mud and saliva.** Why didn't he just heal with the power of his word? He just told the invalid in chapter 5, "*Get up and walk*" and he did. Here he could have just said, "*Open your eyes and see.*"
 - Now there are a number of good explanations as to why Jesus chose to use the mud, but I'll focus on the most obvious one that the passage emphasizes.
- ❖ Look back at v13, "[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.*"
 - So we're told in v14 that this healing took place on the Sabbath, which is really what ticked off the Pharisees. This is identical to what happened in chapter 5. The irony is just as thick. **Anyone with an ounce of compassion would have at least been glad to see this man relieved of such great suffering.**
 - It must take a hyper-religiosity and a heart so blinded by self-righteousness that your first reaction to this kind of news is to flip out because one of your rules were broken.

- ❖ But I think Jesus was asking for it. **He wanted to “break” the Sabbath.** If you recall when we studied chapter 5, the Pharisees in those days were zealous to keep the Sabbath holy. So they came up with 39 categories of “work” that you should not be doing on the Sabbath, and one of those categories included kneading – like kneading dough to make bread. It turns out that making a mud pack out of dirt and saliva falls under that category.
 - And according to the tradition of the Pharisees, healings were only allowed on the Sabbath if they involved matters of life and death. Obviously, healing a man born blind could wait until the next day.

- ❖ But Jesus couldn’t wait because he was trying to shine a spotlight – to shine the truth of God – into the darkened hearts of the Pharisees, exposing their self-righteousness and empty religiosity.
 - Now this has two effects on this group of Pharisees. Some shut their eyes even tighter and insist that Jesus must be a sinner. He cannot be “*from God*” since he violated the Sabbath (in their opinion).
 - But for some, they can’t deny the wonder of this miracle, which they rightly conclude is only possible by the power of God. Therefore, they find it hard to believe that a “sinner” could be used so powerfully as an agent of God. So there was a division among them.

- ❖ Keep reading in **v17**, “[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.”*
 - This is where I was going to build a third point on how Jesus shines his light to confront human fears. But I’ll just let Scripture speak for itself on that point.

- ❖ [24] *So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, “Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner.”* [25] *He answered, “Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”* [26] *They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”* [27] *He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?”* [28] *And they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. [29] We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.”* [30] *The man answered, “Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. [31] We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God*

listens to him. [32] Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. [33] If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” [34] *They answered him, “You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?” And they cast him out.*

- This confirms the self-righteous thinking that was driving their reaction. They just assume this man born blind must be a great sinner who was “*born in utter sin*”. You can’t lecture us. We’ll lecture you.
- ❖ [35] *Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” [36] He answered, “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” [37] Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.” [38] He said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.*”
- That word for “*worship*” literally means to prostrate yourself. This man is laid out, on his face, worshipping, with his eyes wide open. He now sees that Jesus is more than a healer, more than a prophet. He is the Lord Almighty.
- ❖ [39] *Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.” [40] Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, “Are we also blind?” [41] Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.”*”
- Here Jesus tells us why he was sent by the Father. As John already explained in **chapter 1:9**, “*The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.*” **The true light was coming to shine his light among a spiritually darkened world filled with spiritually blinded people.**
- ❖ Now those “*who do not see*”, that is, those who, like the blind man, recognize their blindness, who admit they’re lost in the dark – to those Jesus opens their eyes and gives true sight.
- But to “*those who see*” – which is an sarcastic way of saying “to those who *think* they can see” – Jesus’ light and its brightness drives them away deeper into darkness, deeper into their blindness.
- ❖ In **v41**, Jesus explains that if they were blind, that is if they recognized their spiritual blindness, then they would not be guilty of rejecting the true light. They would have stepped out into it along with this blind man.
- But since they insist upon their ability to see - since they reject any notion of lostness – they inevitably shut their eyes to the light, thereby confirming their blindness and demonstrating they truly are lost in the darkness of their sin. Their guilt remains.
 - As it says in **John 3:19**, “*And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.*”

- ❖ **What this means for us today is that a recognition of your spiritual blindness (your lostness in the dark night of sin) is needed before you can receive spiritual sight at the hands of Jesus.** In other words, if you think you can see just fine without him, then you have no need for a Christ who opens blind eyes and rescues people from darkness.
 - If you see yourself as strong and able-bodied, then of course you have no need for crutches. **If you are right in your own eyes (self-righteous), then why would you need a Savior to make you right before God?**

- ❖ But this is why God is willing to weave suffering into your life, to help you see the truth that you are neither seeing, strong, nor righteous. This was certainly the case for the blind beggar. **Making him blind from birth was God's way of humbling him, keeping him from trusting in his own righteousness.** Yes, it was a severe mercy, yet blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for God's righteousness (because they despair of their own) for they shall be satisfied.

- ❖ **I experienced a severe mercy when, in God's good purpose, he made my wife and I suffer through a season of infertility.** It was painful to go through, but we are better off for it. For in our suffering, God exposed self-righteousness that was still in our hearts.
 - I remember being bitter at God. I had devoted my life to him. I made sacrifices for him. I was in seminary at the time, preparing to serve him and his church full-time. And yet he couldn't (or wouldn't) answer my simple, earnest prayer for a child?
 - But then God confronted me with the truth. I came to see how righteous I was in my own eyes and how deserving I thought I was of his good gifts.

- ❖ **In other words, I had reverted back to that childish theology where God always gives good gifts to good boys and girls, and he only stubs your toe if you've been acting up.** Just like the disciples, I was trying to draw a clear, direct line between my righteous deeds and divine reward and between my sinful deeds and divine punishment.
 - And now in hindsight, I can see that one reason why God put us through that suffering was – not to punish us for any particular sin – but to expose that kind of self-righteous thinking and to purge it from our hearts.

- ❖ Until my eyes were opened to the reality of how self-righteous I can still be, I had yet to understand how much I need Jesus. I had yet to appreciate all that he has done for me through his life, death, and resurrection.
 - **God strongly reminded me that blessings come my way – not because I'm righteous and deserving – but because I am *in Christ* who is righteous and is deserving.**
 - And I was reminded that suffering comes my way – not because I'm being punished for sin since Christ fully bore my punishment in his death. **So for the Christian, suffering is not an exacting of punishment. It's a working out of God's good purpose in our lives aimed at his glory and our good.**

- ❖ **Friends, this is why I pray for the God of Light to come and perform the same miracle in your hearts.** May the God who said "*Let light shine out of darkness*" shine in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6).
 - **It's going to take a miracle to get your heart to rejoice to see the works of God displayed *in and through* your suffering.** Only until your eyes are open will you be able to say, "*I'd rather have God working in my life than a pair of working eyes. I'd rather have God working in my life than perfect health or perfect children.*"

- ❖ **It'll take a miracle for you to consider your affliction “light and momentary” in comparison to the eternal weight of glory being prepared for you in heaven** (2 Cor. 4:17). It'll take a supernatural act of God for you to consider the suffering of this present time as not worth comparing with the glory to be revealed to us (Rom. 8:18).
 - **And here Jesus is proving that he is just the man to do it.** He is the Light of the World who makes the blind to see!