

John on Jesus - Born Blind

November 18, 2012

(Preached as a first person fictional narrative from John 9) I love to work.

I love to pound nails into wood. I love to sand wood and see the beauty of the grain. Best of all I love to see the smiles on my customers' faces. For years, I couldn't do that.

I can see that some of you recognize me. That happens all the time in Jerusalem. People always ask me, "Do you have a brother?" Some say, "You remind me of someone I know but I can't remember who." The most astute say I am the spitting image of the blind beggar who used to sit outside the temple in Jerusalem, the man who begged for a few shekels to eat his next meal.

I don't have a brother. I know you will find this hard to believe but I am the beggar who sat outside the temple. If it wasn't my own story, I would have a hard time believing it. For the first time in my life I can see. I can work. I can serve others instead of living off handouts. It is all because of a man named Jesus. Let me tell you my story.

I live here, in Jerusalem, with my parents. I was born blind. As a child, and even as an adult, I couldn't do much for myself. My mother was always afraid to leave the house for fear I would unknowingly wander out the front door into the street where I would be lost in the crowd. She was afraid to leave me alone in the kitchen for fear I would touch a hot pot on the stove or a sharp knife in the kitchen. Most of you take your sight for granted. When you are blind, you cannot do anything for yourself.

As I grew older, my parents came up with an idea of how I could contribute to our family. I could beg. In the morning, they would lead me by the hand to the temple where I could sit on a street corner and beg from the crowds on their way to temple worship. I would raise my gray lifeless eyes to the sky, hold my hands in the air and say, "A few shekels for the blind." It was a decent income. As the crowds saw me on their way to worship, the sight of my eyes pulled the strings of their heart. Fathers, wanting to model compassion for their children, would stop and put a few coins into my hands.

Children say things that adults are afraid to voice. I would often hear the children whisper, "Daddy, why is he blind? What did he do to deserve this?" I felt like an oddity of the human race. "Why?" is a question I asked myself for years. "God, why was I born like this? What did I do to deserve this? God, don't you love me?"

Last year, as the Feast of Tabernacles drew to a close, God began answering my prayers. I was outside the temple in my usual spot, begging for a handout. I heard the man named Jesus was in town. The people were talking about him. I heard that in the northern region of Galilee he healed many of their sick. He even fed a hungry crowd of thousands with just a small boy's lunch. I dreamt this man named Jesus would heal me. That felt impossible. How would I find him in this city that was bursting with people? Even if I met him, why would he care about me, a blind beggar?

As the Feast of Tabernacles was ending, there was a glimmer of hope that my dreams and prayers might become true. I heard commotion in the crowd.

The crowd was talking about Jesus in the temple. He was in a debate with the religious leaders. In the way that only a blind man can sense, I felt the crowd's pressing into the temple to watch Jesus in this debate.

After some time, I heard more commotion in the crowd. The flow of the people reversed. Jesus and his disciples were leaving the temple. They were coming my way. Jesus would pass me. As best I could with my gray sightless eyes I turned in the direction of the noise. I held my hands in the air and prayed hoping Jesus would see me.

Then it happened. The crowd grew closer. Not in the voice of a child but in the voice of a man I heard the question so many ask, "Jesus, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus gave an answer I never heard. He said, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the work of God might be displayed in him." Would Jesus use me? Could it be true that I was blind for a purpose? Was it true that God was going to use my blindness to bring him glory?

I sensed someone on his knees in front of me. I heard a spitting sound. What was Jesus doing? Again and again he cleared his throat and spit on the ground. Next, I heard his fingers stirring in the dirt as he made mud with his spit. Then, Jesus reached out and touched my eyes. It wasn't what I expected. He put his spit-mud on my face. This was embarrassing. Being a blind beggar was bad enough but now I looked like a woman enduring a mud mask beauty treatment. I thought, "Jesus, this is not the way I heard you healed others." I thought he would wave his hand over my eyes or just say a word. Why was he

putting spit and dirt on my face? Jesus then told me to go wash in the pool of Siloam. Moments later, he was gone in the crowd, just as fast as he came.

Why did he ask me to wash in the pool of Siloam? I wanted to scrape the dirt off my face with my fingers. Why not go to the pools of Bethesda? They were just around the corner. The pool of Siloam was on the other side of the city. I decided I would obey his word. If I believed he could heal my eyes, I needed to believe his word, even when it didn't appear to make sense.

I held the fringe of a friend's coat as he led me across town. It took an hour to get there. When we arrived, he supported me so I wouldn't fall in as I washed my face. Then it happened. As the mud came off, light burst into my eyes like I was staring into the noon day sun. Blinding light. Blues, reds, greens --- all colors I had never seen --- burst into my brain. I could see! Jesus healed me! The world was so big, the sky so blue, the colors so beautiful. I was healed. I couldn't contain myself. I began walking back to my corner, toward the temple that stood out over other buildings on the horizon. When I arrived at the temple I began running towards my parents' home. I burst through the front door. "Mom and Dad, I can see!"

For the first time I saw the faces of my parents. You should have seen the looks on their faces. They thought it was one of my practical jokes. They didn't believe me so I began telling my mother how she looked. She had beautiful gray hair, soft brown eyes, and she was wearing a lovely green. Now the look on their faces was one of astonishment. My mother ran to me with her hand over

her mouth and tears streaming down her face. She began running her fingers over my eyes. She couldn't believe I was healed.

She couldn't contain herself. She ran out the door to tell our friends and neighbors about the miracle. My father, on the other hand, just sat and stared. He kept asking me how many fingers he held in the air. He couldn't believe I had my sight.

While my dad couldn't stop staring, my mother couldn't stop talking. After no time at all she returned to tell me people wouldn't believe her so she was taking me with her to show them that I was healed. She dragged me from house to house to show our friends and neighbors. An amazing thing happened. Some friends celebrated with us while others refused to believe it was me. They said I was just somebody that looked like her son. I insisted it was me. Ask me any question. I will prove it to you. I was blind, but now, because of a miracle from Jesus, I can see. He put mud on my eyes and told me to wash in the pool of Siloam, and now, I can see.

You can imagine the controversy this caused in our neighborhood. Everyone wanted to touch me, but many people refused to believe it was me. "Blind men do not wash mud off their face and come away seeing," they said. That kind of thing just doesn't happen. Finally, the neighbors decided to bring me to the Pharisees. They spent their life studying the book. They knew God, and his ways, better than any of us.

I returned to the temple and told them my story. Jesus made mud, put it on my eyes, told me to wash in the pool of Siloam, and when I did, I could see.

That didn't help these religious scholars. Rather than settling the crowd, my words sparked an argument. Just like our neighborhood, some believed I was healed while others refused to look at the evidence.

Some believed Jesus was a man from God, so he could open the eyes of a man born blind. Others refused to consider that option.

The day Jesus healed me was a Sabbath. Many of our religious leaders claimed Jesus was not a man from God because he broke their Sabbath tradition. First, he healed on the Sabbath, which they claimed was only permissible if life was in danger. Blindness was not life-threatening. Second, he kneaded on the Sabbath making mud with his spit. He worked on a day of rest. Third, he put the mud on my eyes, which according to those of the strictest tradition, was a form of work on the Sabbath.

Finally, they asked for my opinion. That was strange. Why did they want my opinion? I am just a blind beggar. They are the religious scholars. All I could think about was the Bible stories my mother taught me when I was a child. They were stories of men of God, prophets, performing miraculous deeds in the name of God. Jesus reminded me of them. That is it. I think he is a prophet. That didn't settle the room. Whenever I said something positive about Jesus, the room broke out into an argument. They decided to call my parents.

It was at that time, I learned they had an agenda against Jesus. They had already decided, before hearing any evidence, that if anyone believed Jesus was the Christ, the anointed Son of God, he or she would be excommunicated from the synagogue. For Jews to be barred from the temple was social suicide. It

meant your friends and neighbors would shun you. Your shop would be boycotted. Your relatives would disown you. If you were barred from the temple, it would be wise to move to another city.

What were my parents to do? Their futures hung in the balance as they were interrogated by our religious leaders. Thankfully, my father was a very wise man. He prepped my mother on what to say. Stick with the facts. This is our son. He was born blind. We don't know how he sees or who opened his eyes. If you have any other question, ask him yourself. He is of age.

Now, I was frustrated. No, I was angry. For years, I was blind. For years, I begged and lived on handouts. For years these men saw me outside the temple on the side of the road. Jesus healed me. It was obvious. They all knew me, but just like people in my neighborhood, they were closing their eyes to the facts. They had already decided Jesus wasn't the Christ even though they could see I was healed by a miracle that was unprecedented in history. How could they be so ruthless and heartless with my parents? They stepped over the line.

Next, they began interrogating me. "Give glory to God," they said. "We know that this man is a sinner." I recognized that phrase. When they said, "Give glory to God," they were putting me under oath. They claimed they knew Jesus was a sinner. They claimed to know Jesus was not a man from God. They were accusing me of lying. They were accusing me of acting as a deceiver who was sinfully trying to undermine the nation. They wanted me to come clean from a lie.

I began to turn a bright shade of red. Sometimes, when you are get angry, it is hard to bite your tongue. I couldn't restrain my words. I spoke my mind.

I said, "I don't know if Jesus is a sinner or not. All I know is I was blind and now I see." Then they returned to their interrogation and asked me to tell them again exactly how Jesus opened my eyes. "I already told you. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to be his disciples?" I knew that would set them off. One of them said, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We knew God spoke to Moses, but as for Jesus, we don't know where he came from." They don't know where Jesus came from?

Couldn't they see the obvious? They keep closing their eyes to the evidence. Jesus opened my eyes. God doesn't listen to sinners but only people who worship him and do his will. Never before in the history of the world has someone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If Jesus were not from God, he could do none of this. Why couldn't they see this? Why did they refuse to see the obvious? I was blind and now I see. That is something only a man of God can do. Why did they think I am a liar when they know me? They walked by me many times.

I pushed them over the edge. In a rage they said, "You were born in utter sin. How dare you lecture us?" With that, they threw me out of the synagogue. I wasn't lecturing them; I was just telling them they need to open their eyes. Just look at the evidence. I was blind and now I see. Jesus did it. It is only a man of God who can do a miracle like this.

Cast out of the synagogue, I wandered the bustling streets. My heart was filled with a mixture of joy and sadness. Joy, because I could see, but sadness because I was kicked out of the synagogue. Sadness because the pharisees

refused to see God's miracle through Jesus. They made their decision to reject him before examining the facts.

As the sun began to set, I wandered the streets. In the midst of the crowd, a hand reached from behind and touched my shoulder. I did not recognize the face. It was a face filled with gentleness and love. It wasn't angry and harsh like the face of our religious leaders. While I didn't recognize the face, I instantly knew the voice. It was Jesus.

"Do you believe in the Son of Man?" he said. I knew that reference from growing up in the synagogue with my parents. It was reference to the book of Daniel. The Son of Man is a man sent from God who will restore our relationships with God. The Son of Man is the judge of the earth. Some people will worship him; others will rebel and fight against him.

I said to Jesus, "Who is he?" Jesus said, "You have seen him. He is the one speaking to you."

It was at that moment when everything snapped into focus. Jesus was not just a prophet. He is not just a man of God. Jesus is the Son of Man. He is God in a human body who came to earth to save us from our sin. Some people will see him for who he is and worship him. Other people will reject him and fight against him because they are blind and can't recognize him. I bowed down and worshipped.

Then I realized Jesus had done not one but two miracles that day. He miraculously opened the eyes of my body, but he also miraculously opened the eyes of my spirit so I could see him and recognize him as the very Son of Man.

The real tragedy in this world is not physical blindness but spiritual blindness. Everyone is born physically blind, and it is only by a miracle from God that they can see Jesus and recognize him for who he is. What a great reversal of fortunes. The great religious leaders of our community who studied God and his word were blind to Jesus, but the blind beggar who sat on the street corner had his eyes opened to Jesus. A gift I never deserved.

Today, I enjoy work. I enjoy using my eyes to do things that can help people. Everywhere I go, I tell my Christ story. The reaction to it is always the same. Some people are brought to see Jesus through the miracle he did in my life. Others refuse to believe it is true. Rather than getting upset, I expect it. I know it is only by a miracle of God that they will be able to see and recognize the true identity of Jesus through his work in my life.

My prayer, as I shared my story with you, is that God will do a miracle in your heart and open your eyes to see Jesus for who he really is.

Conclusion

I realize I need to go. I am going to be late for work. I can't wait to pound nails I can see. I can't wait to sand wood and look at the beautiful grain. Best of all, I can't wait to see the smiles on the faces of my customers.



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