THE BLIND SEE, BUT THE SEEING ARE BLIND

John 9:35-41

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John, Lesson 53

The Blind See, but the Seeing are Blind
John 9:35-41

We’ve all heard “good news, bad news” jokes. Here are a couple aimed at me as a pastor (from cybersalt.org):

Good News: The Women’s Guild voted to send you a get-well card.
Bad News: The vote passed 31-30.
Good News: Church attendance rose dramatically the last three weeks.
Bad News: You were on vacation.

Our text gives us good news and bad news, but it’s not a joke. It’s deadly serious! The best possible news is: Jesus! The worst possible news is: Jesus! For many, Jesus is good news because He opens their blind eyes and gives them eternal life. For many others, Jesus is bad news because they reject His gift of sight and they will face eternal judgment (see 1 Pet. 2:6-8 for the same truth).

In other words, Jesus always divides people into one of two camps: Those who believe in Him for salvation receive eternal life; those who reject Him are hardened in unbelief and face eventual eternal punishment (Matt. 25:46). There is no third category. So, be very careful how you respond to Jesus!

We come to the conclusion of the story of Jesus healing the man who was born blind. As we’ve seen, this miracle, which Jesus performed on the Sabbath, caused a division among the Pharisees: Some said (9:16), “This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath.” But others argued, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” The prevailing group were those that contended that Jesus was not from God, who in a few months succeeded in crucifying Him. They couldn’t refute the reasoning of the blind man, so they threw him out of the temple (9:34). Our text picks up the story when Jesus found the rejected man and asked him a crucial question, bringing him to solid faith. The story con-
cludes by contrasting the blind man’s faith with the hard hearts of the unbelieving Pharisees. The lesson is:

**Jesus came to give sight to the spiritually blind, but also to bring those who think they see without Him to judgment.**

To quote Jesus (9:39), “For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind.” Our text falls into two sections: (1) The blind see (9:35-38); (2) The seeing are blind (9:39-41).

1. **The blind see: Jesus came to give sight to the spiritually blind (9:35-38).**

Jesus heard that the Jewish leaders had kicked this man out of the temple, which was a serious matter in that society. His neighbors would have shunned him out of fear of having the religious police target them. Although now the man was physically able to work for the first time in his life, no one would hire a man who had been excommunicated by the religious authorities. Probably many in the marketplace would also refuse to do business with such an outcast. But it was at this time, perhaps as he was standing in bewilderment outside the temple precincts, that Jesus found him and asked him the most important question in the world (9:35), “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” (The KJV and NJKV read, “Son of God”; but “Son of Man” is almost certainly the original text.) These verses contain five important lessons:

A. **Jesus takes the initiative by seeking those who are blind.**

“Finding him” (9:35) implies that Jesus was looking for him. Jesus said (Luke 19:10), “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” The religious crowd had rejected this poor man. He was an outcast from society. But at that very moment, Jesus went looking for him and brought him to solid faith by asking, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” The former blind man asked (9:36), “Who is He, Sir, that I may believe in Him?” (The same Greek word may be translated either “sir” or “Lord,” depending on the context. In 9:36, the blind man does not yet know Jesus as Lord, so it should be translated, “sir.” In 9:38, he recognizes Jesus as the Lord who opened his eyes, so there it should be translated, “Lord.”). Jesus’ reply must have thrilled his soul (9:37): “You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is
talking with you.” The man had not yet seen very many people, but now he saw Jesus and he recognized his voice as that of the man who had healed him. And so he instantly believed in Jesus.

The Bible repeatedly stresses that if you believe in Jesus, it’s not because you came up with the idea first and went looking for Him. Rather, God chose you in Him before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). He sought you when you were dead in your trespasses and sins and granted saving faith to you as His gracious gift (Eph. 2:1-9). Thus our salvation is “to the praise of the glory of His grace” (Eph. 1:6). If you chose Him by your own free will, then you can share the glory for your salvation. But if He chose you apart from anything meritorious in you, then He gets all the glory (see 1 Cor. 1:26-31).

B. Jesus alone has the power to open blind eyes.

Opening blind eyes is a God-thing (Ps. 146:8). As the former blind man pointed out to the Pharisees (John 9:32-33), “Since the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, He could do nothing.” As Jesus’ dialogue with the Pharisees at the end of this chapter shows, this miracle was also a parable about salvation. Just as opening the eyes of one born blind is something that only God can do, so saving a soul is something that only God can do. It takes His mighty power to impart new life to those who are spiritually dead in their sins.

While (as we’ll see in a moment) to be saved, sinners must believe in Jesus, they cannot believe simply by exercising their own will power. As John 1:12-13 states, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of man, but of God.”

Or, to use the blindness and light metaphor (2 Cor. 4:4, 6), Satan “has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” Then, how can we gain spiritual sight? Paul continues, “For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” Just as God’s
power spoke light into existence, so His power opens blind eyes when He saves a soul.

C. To move from spiritual blindness to sight, admit that you're blind.

Of course, the man who was born blind had no problem admitting that he could not see. That was obvious. But the proud Pharisees thought that they were the only ones in Israel with spiritual sight. They imply this when they railed against the former blind man (9:34), “You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us?” And they imply it in their sarcastic question to Jesus (9:40), “We are not blind too, are we?” But Jesus replied (9:41), “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.” In other words, if they would have admitted their blindness, Jesus would have healed them by forgiving their sins. But since they insisted that they could see, they remained in their sins.

One of the main things that keeps people from gaining spiritual sight is that they refuse to admit that they're blind. They think that they're good enough to qualify for heaven. They may admit that they need a little boost from God. But they minimize their sins. They won't admit that they're totally blind and that they don't just need bifocals; they need sight! As the old hymn, “Rock of Ages,” put it:

Not the labors of my hands can fulfill Thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know, could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone; Thou must save and Thou alone.

So, to move from spiritual blindness to sight, admit that you’re blind.

D. To move from spiritual blindness to sight, believe in Jesus for who He is.

Jesus' question to this formerly blind man is the most important question you can ever answer: “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” You must answer that question, either now or at the judgment, when it will be too late. Your eternal destiny hinges on answering that question rightly: “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” To answer it rightly, answer these three questions:
1) Who is the Son of Man?

The former blind man asked Jesus (9:36), “Who is He, Sir, that I may believe in Him?” That question parallels Jesus’ question to the twelve (Matt. 16:15), “Who do you say that I am?” It’s the most important question in all of life to answer correctly. Faith is only as good as its object. If you believe in a false Jesus, you cannot be saved, any more than if you believed in an idol. So this question is crucial so that you believe in Jesus for who He is.

The title “Son of Man” is used over 80 times in the Gospels, including 12 times in the Gospel of John, plus four other times in the New Testament (The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible [Zondervan], ed. by Merrill Tenney, 4:203, 5:485-486). It almost always occurs on the lips of Jesus referring to Himself. It was not an accepted or widely used messianic designation in Jesus’ day. He may have used it because it avoided the political overtones that “Messiah” carried at that time. It was a way of alluding to and yet veiling His messiahship. It shows Him to be the representative man, the last Adam, and thus has nuances of humanity in it.

But it also has overtones of deity, stemming from Daniel 7:13-14, where the Son of Man receives an everlasting kingdom where all people serve Him. At Jesus’ trial, the high priest commanded (Matt. 26:63), “I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God.” Jesus replied, alluding to Daniel 7 (26:64), “You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN.” In John’s Gospel, the term is always associated either with Christ’s heavenly glory or with the salvation He came to bring.

D. A. Carson (The Gospel According to John [Eerdmans/Apollos], p. 376) argues that in light of John’s usage of the term, “Jesus is inviting the man to put his trust in the one who is the revelation of God to man…. Jesus himself is the Word incarnate, the one who uniquely reveals God.” Carson also points out that the term in John is connected with Jesus’ role as judge (5:27), which relates to John 9:39-41.

So the correct answer to “Who is the Son of Man?” is, “He is the eternal Word who took on human flesh and offered Himself as
the sacrifice for our sins (John 1:14, 18; 3:13; 12:23, 32, 34). He is risen from the dead and one day He will judge all the living and the dead (5:27). He is the one in whom we must believe.

2) What does it mean to believe in Him?

In a nutshell, it means to trust Jesus to do what He promised to do. He told the woman at the well that if she asked, He would give her living water (4:10). She asked and He gave! He told the royal official whose son was sick (4:50), “Go, your son lives.” He believed Jesus and left for home and found his son healed. Here, He told the blind man to go to the Pool of Siloam and wash. He went and washed and came away seeing. Jesus promises to give eternal life to whoever believes in Him (3:16). To believe in Him means that you stop believing in your own good works as the way to heaven (as the Pharisees did). To believe in Him means to admit that you’re a sinner and to trust that His death on the cross will atone for all of your sins. Trust Him as you would trust a doctor by taking the prescribed medicine. But there’s a third question that you need to answer to move from spiritual blindness to sight:

3) Do I believe in Him?

This blind man had obeyed Jesus implicitly by going to the pool and washing. He miraculously experienced having his eyes opened. He had borne witness before the hostile Sanhedrin to the point that they kicked him out of the temple. But he still needed to answer this question: “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

So, don’t take the question for granted! You may think, “I grew up in the church. I’ve always believed in Jesus.” But, do you trust in Him personally as your only hope for heaven? Perhaps you have always tried to obey the Bible’s teaching and lead a moral life. Great, but do you believe in Jesus as your Savior from your sin? Maybe you’ve even preached the gospel to others. Charles Spurgeon (Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit [Pilgrim Publications], 36:232) tells of a preacher he knew who got saved while preaching his own sermon! Finally, a saved person in the congregation recognized the change that had come about during the sermon and he cried, “The parson’s converted. Hallelujah!” Everyone broke out in cries of praise and they all joined in singing the doxology! So each of us needs to answer the question, “Do I believe in Jesus?”
But, how can you know if your belief is genuine? After all, we’ve seen several instances in John where people professed faith in Jesus, but it wasn’t genuine saving faith. There are other signs of new life in Christ, but this former blind man reveals these:

E. When you truly believe in Jesus, you gain spiritual sight, confess Jesus as Lord, and bow before Him in worship.

He was blind, but now he saw (9:25). He testified of Jesus as Lord as best as he knew how to these intimidating Jewish leaders. As I mentioned, the Greek word in 9:38 should be translated, “Lord, I believe.” He confessed Jesus as Lord. And, he bowed before Him in worship. At this point, he may not have fully understood that Jesus was God manifest in the flesh. But he was giving Jesus far more honor than one would give to an ordinary man or even to a prophet (John Calvin, Calvin’s Commentaries [Baker], p. 389). Carson (p. 377) says that while it is not clear that he was yet addressing Jesus as “my Lord and my God,” as Thomas did after the resurrection, it is likely that he was “offering obeisance to Jesus as the redeemer from God, the revealer of God.”

Can you say, “One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see”? Do you openly confess Jesus as your Lord? Do you bow before Him in worship, not just outwardly, but in spirit and in truth (4:24), and not just on Sundays, but all through the week? Those are some of the marks of genuine saving faith.

But, sadly, the story does not end there, with the blind man seeing. It goes on to warn us by showing that there are some who think they see, but they’re really blind:

2. The seeing blind: Jesus came to bring those who think they see without Him to judgment (9:39-41).

While the blind man illustrates those who progress in faith to the point of worship, the Pharisees show us that some regress irretrievably in unbelief to the point of judgment. Jesus has already warned them (8:21, 24) that unless they believed in Him, they would die in their sins. Now, He says (9:39), “For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind.” When they sarcastically retort, “We are not blind too, are we?” Jesus answers (9:41), “If you were
blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.' Briefly, note three things:

A. To stay in spiritual blindness, insist that you see on your own and thus have no need for the Savior.

As we've seen, the way to see is to admit that you're blind. Jesus is in the business of opening blind eyes. But if you assert that you see quite well without Jesus, then He will leave you in your blindness. In other words, pride keeps you from grace. God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble (1 Pet. 5:5).

B. To stay in spiritual blindness, reject the gift of sight that Jesus offers to you.

Verse 41 is a gracious offer of salvation: “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.” Jesus is saying, “If you would admit your blindness, I would heal you and you would not come into judgment. But your stubborn rejection of Me keeps you in your sins.” Rejecting the light that God graciously gives leads to further hardening and judgment.

C. The result of rejecting spiritual sight is to be hardened in unbelief that culminates in eternal judgment.

There is a scary principle in the Bible: If you reject the light that God graciously gives you, He will confirm your rejection and leave you in your blindness. In Matthew 13, the disciples ask Jesus why He spoke to the people in parables. He responds (13:14-15) by citing the prophecy of Isaiah 6:9:

“In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says,

You will keep on hearing, but will not understand;
You will keep on seeing, but will not perceive;
For the heart of this people has become dull,
With their ears they scarcely hear,
And they have closed their eyes,
Otherwise they would see with their eyes,
Hear with their ears,
And understand with their heart and return,
And I would heal them.”
This means that the way you respond to the question, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” has huge consequences! If you shrug your shoulders and say, “I don’t know,” or “I don’t care,” or “I’ll think about it later,” you’re closing your eyes to the light that God is offering you. He is not obligated to give you any more light. If you keep on rejecting His gracious offer of salvation, you may keep on hearing without understanding and keep on seeing without perceiving. Your heart may grow dull and you may die in your sins, only to face eternal judgment.

Maybe you’re wondering, “How can Jesus say here, ‘For judgment I came into this world,’ when John 3:17 states, “For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world would be saved through Him”? If you keep reading John 3:18-21, the concept of judgment is implicit in Jesus’ coming, although it wasn’t His primary purpose for coming. John 3:18-19 states, “He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.”

The purpose of the sun is to give light, but light by its very nature casts shadows. Jesus’ coming as the Light of the world means that the shadow of judgment is necessarily cast on those who reject Him. So by His very nature Jesus divides all people into two camps. Some allow the light to expose their sin and ask Jesus to cleanse them and give them sight. Others hate the light because they love their sin. They reject Jesus and come under His judgment.

**Conclusion**

So Jesus is either good news or bad news for you, and I assure you, He is no joke! Your eternal destiny hinges on your response to Jesus’ question, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” Join the former blind man by responding, “Lord, I believe.” And fall at His feet in worship!
Application Questions

1. Some argue that we should not bring up judgment or hell when we share the gospel, but only focus on God’s love. Is this biblical? Why/why not?

2. Why is self-righteousness one of the greatest hindrances to believing in Christ? How can we help such people see their sin?

3. Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons claim to believe in Jesus as Savior and Lord. Why is their faith not saving faith?

4. Gaining spiritual sight, confessing Jesus as Lord, and worshiping Him are three evidences of genuine saving faith. What are some others (give biblical references)?

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