

I am not Pastor Tom, you can come again next Sunday and you will hear God's word preached with authority and relevance. Today I am standing in as one of the elders in this church. And as an elder I am hereby authorizing my wife to read the scriptures today. It is the long chapter 9 of the Gospel of John. She is reading from the English standard version, and you can follow along from the Gideon bible on page 758 in the pew in front of you or on the overhead, or on your digital devices.

## Scripture: John 9

Let me pray: "Father, your word is truth, it will never pass away, may it speak to us this morning. Amen"

This is my favorite chapter in the bible and I hope you will see why, by the end of this true story. And I will use J.B. Phillips transliteration as he tells the story.

The story starts out with: *Later, as Jesus walked along.....* later than what? Well He had just come from the temple where he had claimed to be the "I AM" ...John 8:58... *I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I am.* And because of that claim he had narrowly escaped assassination for "blasphemy". Some modern theologians say that Jesus never really claimed to be God, but here is one instance when he certainly did. And he is going to prove it moments later.... *He saw a man who had been blind from birth...* blind folks evoke our pity, and this patient is simply incurable by even the best of today's medical technologies. If you're born without vision, the vital connections between the retina and the optical cortex in the back of the brain aren't established, and the dis-connect can be anywhere between the front of the eyeball and that part of the brain where the picture is interpreted. So, even if the eye defect can be cured later in life, the person doesn't see, **period**. It is so very important to fix the eye problem near birth, in those cases where the fault lies in the eyeball itself. That was the case I encountered one day when I had begun to do eye surgeries at our mission hospital in Cameroon in the seventies of the last century. (because there was only one ophthalmologist in the country of 7 million people, I got a few months of training at the Alex and started to treat the curable blind after our first furlough.) One day the midwives came into my consulting room and brought a newborn with cataracts- both pupils were white, the rest of the eye was sound. So I had to try and remove the obstruction, meaning remove the lens material from both eyes.

I was fairly satisfied with the result. It wasn't all that easy to work on a newborn's little eyes, especially with a veterinary type of anesthetic where the patient does not lie absolutely still and the drug may also raise the pressure in the eyeball. Soon after that surgery I went home to Canada and six years later came back to the country as a volunteer, and wouldn't you know, one day a man brought his daughter saying she wanted to go to school now. I looked at her consultation card and recognized my handwriting (which is a miracle in my wife's eyes, while I can usually read it quite ok.) it was the same girl I had operated 7 years earlier. Well now she needed to see things a lot more clearly than had been sort of ok for the first 7 years of her life. So I scrounged around in my big cardboard box of donated used cataract glasses and actually found the only child's pair which happened to have the appropriate thick lenses. The smile on the girls face made me really happy too, and they went away after paying the usual fee of maybe 4 dollars for the consult and the glasses. I never saw them again, but it confirms the bottom line of my argument- **this** guy in John's story has an incurable problem. Blind from birth. Sees nothin'.

Now Jesus is surrounded by his 12 close followers and the usual crowd of hangers on, women who fed him, some children, perhaps, religious leaders; all somewhat restricted in their movement, because this was the Sabbath day when Jewish people were not supposed to walk more than one kilometer all day.

Anyway, the disciples have an interesting question of their teacher: *Master, whose sin caused this man's blindness, his own or his parents'?* Are they considering only these two possibilities for the poor man's misery? We are much more sophisticated, aren't we! We know a lot more today, and we have science on our side. There's genome mapping and counselling, leading to quality of life decisions; which life is worth living and which is NOT. There is personal autonomy and the almighty Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. And soon now, we'll end up with more killing of the unborn, and helping old folks to die when they feel they are no longer useful or just losing control, or hope.

But Jesus brings us down to the real issue: *This man was not born blind because of his own sin, or that of his parents, but to show the power of God at work in him.* Now hold it a minute. This guy was deprived of his sight for 40 years just so Jesus could use him as a teaching object, to show us how good and powerful and merciful He is? Exactly, at least, that's how I understand Jesus here, because he goes on to say: *We must carry on the work of Him who sent me, while the daylight lasts. Night is coming when no-one can work.* I wonder how close we are to that nightfall our Lord is talking about. Remember the one sign of the end times I mentioned recently: *Because of the increase of wickedness the love of most will grow cold. Math 24:12.*

Back to the story: *I am the world's light as long as I am in it.* And even more surprisingly Jesus says to his followers; in Mathew 5:14 *"You are the light of the world"* and in John 14:12: *"greater things than these are you going to do, because I am going (returning) to the Father"*. **Story time:**

Oliver was a 15 yr old, blind from birth, he lived in our boarding school for blind children which Dr. Helen M Schmidt started after I left Cameroon in 1980. His twin brother Richard **too** was born without eyes, so was his younger brother Samuel and when I was back in Cameroon during my 6 mth sabbatical in 1986 their 6 yr old brother Emmanuel also joined them. 4 brothers, **all born blind**. Their two sisters were normal, the oldest and the youngest. (probably due to an x-linked gene in the family for you science majors) Oliver loved to sing, and he had a sweet voice like most of the Oku tribal people. Sammy imitated his brother to the t or the cdefg or whatever. I loved to go down to their compound on Sunday afternoon to sing with them with my autoharp, while they played the drums and the wood xylophone .

We would story and laugh and sing. And the children would ask me a lot of questions while they sat on the merry go round which I had made for them out of an old Toyota rear axle.

One day Oliver asked if he could borrow my autoharp for Sunday service

He was getting baptized, and part of his testimony was a song. That Sunday he actually said that he was glad to have been born blind, because he would have never been able to come to a school such as the Bansa School for blind children. And then he sang his own composition: I have seen the light the light of God shine in my heart. You may gather by now, that there are more ways to see than just physical sight: The blind often use the expression we also use when someone explains something to us: We say: Oh I see, and they do that too!!

I have largely lost contact with those lovable children, but I think Oliver followed several other students to the seminary after his highschool education aided by his ability to read Braille. He was prepared to show others the Light of the world.

People born blind have a heightened sense of hearing, feeling and smelling than we do. Those kids demonstrated that to me over and over. I snuck down quietly to their compound after having been away in Canada for a year, I stood there, and they sensed the stranger suddenly in their midst. Oliver touched my arm very gently and said: doctor, you have come!!

Now I want to demonstrate just what **this** man experienced. Remember, he has never ever seen a thing. So please try to imagine **you** are blind. Just close your eyes now. Please just for a short time. Don't be embarrassed. Just do it. Kids and adults, close your eyes... This is what you hear.... No. don't open your eyes yet. And then you feel a gritty, slimy cool stuff on your left eye, and then your right eye, and the same voice of Yeshua says: *go and wash in the pool of Siloam.*

It could be that this is the watering hole in Jerusalem where people sent their kids to get water for the household, that's the meaning of Siloam: "Sent", or: one who's been sent.

It was located in the southwest corner just inside the city wall and it was fed by the gihon spring about 500 m north from there, via a tunnel dug into the rocks by King Hezekiah 700 years before.

Lifegiving water in time when the enemies besieged the city. Overflowing in abundance while Jerusalem was under siege from Sennacherib the Assyrian.

Interesting note on that name Siloam: (one who's been sent) Jesus was sent by the father and obeyed, This man was sent by Jesus and obeyed! We are sent .....do we obey?

**So the man went and washed and came home with his sight restored.** Now some folks call this a miracle, but it should better be called a sign. A sign is a directional indicator pointing to somewhere, something, someone. Jesus gave many signs, mostly to prove to unbelievers, that He was the One he said He was. It is a little disappointing to me that we as his followers have such a craving for miracles, most of our prayers are for God's supernatural, extraordinary intervention into our dilemmas, sicknesses and troubles. Don't you think we need to have a better idea of God's agenda? Rather than craving his miracles? To get on board with what He's doing in our world, instead of asking him to keep **us** healthy and comfy?

So what **was** Jesus agenda in this story reported by John, Let's see: *His neighbours and the people who had often seen him before as a beggar remarked: "Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?" "Yeah, that's the one" said some. Others said: "Nah, but he looks very much like him."*

*But he himself said: "I'm the man alright". Then how was your blindness cured?" they asked. The man called Yeshua made some clay and smeared it on my eyes, and then he said: "go to Siloam and wash". So off I went and washed, and that's how I got my sight!"* The man was a realist and quite at ease with himself, and he was able to put his neighbours and bystanders at ease, because he knew **about** Jesus. He did not yet **know** Jesus. After all, he had only heard his voice, and obeyed. He was **yet** to see him.

*"Where is He now?" they asked. "I don't know, he returned.*

Now I am not going to speculate why the folks wanted the Jewish authorities to know all about this extraordinary event. Human nature, I suppose. Customs, culture, Mosaic law that anyone healed, had to present himself to the priest to verify the cure, may be.?

*They brought the man who had once been blind before the Pharisees. (It should be noted, that Jesus made the clay and restored his sight on a Sabbath day.) The Pharisees asked the question all over again as to how he had become able to see. "He put clay on my eyes; I washed it off; now I can see, that's*

*all", he replied. Some of the Pharisees commented, "This man cannot be from God, since he does not observe the Sabbath."*

*"But how can a sinner give such wonderful signs as these," others demurred. And they were in two minds about him. Just try it sometime, just mention **the name** and people will be divided, they will argue, have an opinion, swear, nobody's neutral when it comes to **that name! Jesus***

*Finally they asked the blind man **again**: And what do you say about him, you are the one whose sight was restored?"*

*"I believe he is a prophet," he replied. (hey, that's what muslims say, the great Ghandi thought he was a great teacher, but no more.) There really are only four possibilities when it comes to Jesus' claim to be God, said Paul E.Little who wrote the book: "know why you believe" 1.. He was merely a Legend. 2. He was a Liar. 3. He was a Lunatic or 4. He is the Truth. And if **He really is**, what he claimed to be, don't you think you need to pay attention to Him? Besides, there are plenty of witnesses around who have experienced Jesus personally, Just grab any friend of yours who loves Jesus and let him or her tell you **how they met Jesus**.*

*The Jews did not really believe that the man had been blind and had become able to see, until they had summoned his parents and asked them: "Is this your son who **you say** was born blind? How does it happen, that he can now see?"*

*"We know that this is our son, and we know that he was born blind," returned his parents, "but how he can see now, or who made him able to see, we have no idea. (That's a blatant lie, remember he had just gone home after regaining his sight.) Why don't you ask him? He's a grown up man: he can speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews who had already agreed that anybody who admitted that Christ had done this thing should be excommunicated. It was this fear that made the parents say, "Ask him, he is a grown up man." I see myself a lot in these older parents. I am such a coward. I shirk responsibility in the face of brutal consequences. I like my retired state, my comfort in social security, my circle of well-meaning friends. I wouldn't want to be kicked out of the church, out of the neighbourhood, out of the profession. It is painful to be ostracised, and persecuted as are so many of our brothers and sisters in today's world. At least 7 000 killed for their faith last year alone. And hundreds of thousands jailed and tortured, slandered and robbed of all dignity. **Do we pray for them, as we have been told to do?***

*So once again they summoned the man who had been born blind and said to him: "You should give God the glory for what has happened to you. We know that this man is a sinner."*

*Whether he is a sinner or not, I couldn't tell, but one thing I am sure of," the man replied, "I used to be blind, now I can see!" Its preachin' time. This illiterate begger-man takes on the Sanhedrin, the top authority in Israel, who were his former benefactors, throwing him the odd coin whenever they entered the temple.*

*"But what did he **do** to you-----how did he make you see?" they continued.*

*"I've told you before," he replied, Weren't you listening? Why do you want to hear it all over again? Are you wanting to be his disciples too?" This is an outrageous challenge by the man who knows his facts, so the reaction is predictable:*

*At this they turned on him furiously.*

*"You are the one who is his disciple! We are disciples of Moses, We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this man, we don't even know where he came from"*

*"Now here's the extraordinary thing" he retorted, "You don't know where he came from and yet he gave me the gift of sight. Everybody knows that God does not listen to sinners. It is the man who has proper respect for God and does what God wants him to do – he's the one God listens to. Why, since the world began, nobody's ever heard of a man who was born blind being given his sight. If this man did not come from God, he couldn't do such a thing!"* THAT IS Very basic theology, maybe not quite up to OUR standards, but laced with fervor and deep conviction.

*"You misbegotten wretch!" they flung back at him. "Are you trying to teach us?" And they threw him out.* Now here is an outright falsehood. They had just met his parents, so he was not born in utter sin, or a bastard as some translations go. Their fury leads them to spew language which is totally out of order to their high calling of representing God and His laws with a 1300 yr authority behind them. They or more likely their temple guards took him by the scruff of the neck- out!! Wonder if he stumbled and fell headlong onto the street.

Now I come to the whole reason why I just **love** this story.

*Jesus heard that they had expelled him, and when he had found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" "And who is he, sir?" the man replied. "Tell me, so that I can believe in him."* Now remember, this is John's account. He hears people telling Jesus that the man has been thrown out and John says that Jesus looked for him. Well, you and I know that Jesus was fully man and fully God. He was totally aware, he had no need for anyone to tell him how to find this man. But listen to this. Jesus looked for him!! Imagine, **The King of Kings looking for you. The maker of the cosmos and the human genome seeking you. That's more than passing interest. That is LOVE with a passion and purpose.**

**We may still be under the impression of Jeremiah 29:13** Where God says: ***You will seek me and find me, if you will seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you.*** When it is actually Jesus who is looking for you!

**Have you ever been found by Jesus?**

He has this question for the man and for you: *"Do you believe in the Son of Man"*. The Lord consistently gave himself this title throughout the Gospels which refers back to Daniels Prophecy chapter 7 v13-14. *In my vision at night I looked and there before me was one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power. All peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.*

**That is the son of man!**

*And who is he sir,?* the man replied, *Tell me so, that I can believe in Him.* *"You have seen him,"* replied Jesus, *"it is the one who is talking to you now. "Lord, I do believe," he said and worshipped him. ....* **I would have loved to see this form of worship** --probably down on his knees, clutching Jesus feet. But I don't really know and it probably doesn't matter what posture your culture dictates to you. But please **do worship him.** He is who he **says** He is. Just do it. Not just on the Sabbath. Do it all the time!

Then Jesus said, *"My coming into this world is itself a judgement – those who cannot see have their eyes opened and those who think they can see- become blind."*

*Some of the Pharisees near him overheard this and said, "So we are blind too, are we?"*

*"If you were blind, returned Jesus, nobody could blame you, but, as you insist 'We can see' your guilt remains."*

During our 6 mth. volunteer missionary service in 1986 we hosted a total of 36 visitors from Canada including a U of A professor who insisted coming to do some gratis work for the poor people in Cameroon. He was a leading surgeon, head of a dept. who had been an altar boy in some church back in Ontario and wanted to **give back** as the saying goes among some of the very successful people here in Canada. When I led the weekly bible study for senior hospital staff one week, while this professor was there doing his expert surgery, I chose Col 1; 15-23 which I will read now.

*Now Christ is the visible expression of the invisible God. He existed before creation began, for it was through him that everything was made whether spiritual or material, seen or unseen. Through him and for him also were created power and dominion, ownership and authority. In fact every single thing was created through and for him. He is both the first principle and the upholding principle of the whole scheme of creation. And now he is the head of the body which is the church. Life from nothing began through him, and life from the dead began through him, and he is, therefore, justly called the Lord of all. It was in him that the full nature of God chose to live, and through him God planned to reconcile in his own person, as it were, everything on earth and everything in Heaven by virtue of the sacrifice of the cross. That was simply too much for my friend. He could not agree to it, or believe it.*

Yet, children can, and so can you. Do you believe in the Son of Man? Or are you still blind, while your guilt remains?