

Sunday – April 3, 2011  
Pastor – Rev. Walt W. Westbrook  
Sermon – **Spiritual Blindness**

St. Matthias UMC  
Fredericksburg, Va 22405  
[www.stmatthiasumc.org](http://www.stmatthiasumc.org)

### **The Miracle - John 9:1-7**

The man was born blind. The disciples wondered who sinned to cause such a tragedy. Obviously he was being punished for someone's sin. This sort of thing didn't happen just randomly, for no reason. So, taking the position of Job's friends, who knew he must have sinned horribly to have been punished in such an extreme way by God, the disciples are assuming the man's blindness is a punishment for something.

Jesus says this isn't true. Nobody sinned. This man was born blind so God's glory could be revealed through his healing. Who could have known that? Nobody was watching the poor man and waiting for God to be glorified when he gained his sight. I'm sure all his neighbors simply assumed the man was being punished, or his parents were being punished. Suffering comes only as punishment.

But, as common as that assumption was, and can still be today, it was wrong then, and it's wrong now. I don't believe that God sends suffering as punishment. If God sends suffering at all, it is so we can be strengthened through trial, and so we can learn how to be compassionate, sympathetic. If you have never suffered, someone else's suffering would be a complete mystery to you. "What's wrong with him? Why is he such a baby? Why doesn't he shake it off and move ahead with his life?" Only someone without any sensitivity, without any sense of empathy or sympathy could wonder those things.

But, people who have suffered will quite often take action on behalf of people who are suffering. If you've been seeing those commercials for the 3-day walk for breast cancer, the plea to the viewer is to participate so that more women won't have to go through what someone's mother, aunt, sister or wife has gone through. In my years of participating in Relay for Life, I've discovered that the vast majority of people who walk the track or spend the night either survived cancer or know someone who survived cancer or lost someone they love to cancer. They are sympathetic because they have suffered. They understand what cancer does not only to patients, but also to their families.

They don't think that cancer is a punishment from God. They just believe that it is a terrible disease that must be stopped. Don't tell them that their loved one was killed by God for some sin. Don't tell them that surgeries and years of chemotherapy and/or radiation was God's punishment on them and their family because one or all of them sinned. They won't believe you.

So, in the case of the man born blind, Jesus tells us that he was born blind so God's power could be seen in his healing. And, Jesus healed him. He always heals people who need it. He never says, "Obviously, you're supposed to be sick or dying, otherwise my Father would not have smote you." He just goes about the business of relieving suffering.

The fact that it was the Sabbath, and work was forbidden by God's law on the Sabbath ("Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy."), Jesus did some work. He made mud and applied it to the man's eyes. And this healed the man, after he washed the mud off in the pool called Siloam, which means "Sent." This is significant because Jesus was sent by God and he sent the man to the pool.

### **John 9:8-12 - The Initial Inquiry**

The man's neighbors and people who had seen him begging weren't sure they recognized him. I'm guessing he didn't really look very different, but he *was* very different. He could see. And that was impossible. When his friends and neighbors asked how he came to see, he told them only what he knew. He didn't speculate or elaborate. Jesus, mud, Siloam. But, he didn't know where Jesus had gone.

### **John 9:13-17 - A Hearing Before the Pharisees**

So, they bring him to the Pharisees. They don't like it one bit. They try to grill him and catch him in a lie. After all, nobody who would dare break one of the Ten Commandments could heal someone miraculously. The Pharisees went back and forth with this for a while. It **couldn't** be from God. It **had** to be from God. They finally turn back to the man who had been healed and ask, "What do you say about him?" And he answers very simply and correctly, "He is a prophet."

### **John 9:18-23 - The Parents Are Questioned**

The Pharisees, knowing that nobody who had been born blind had ever been healed of their blindness, go to the man's parents. They assault them, demanding how he could possibly see now, if he was born blind. Their answer is that he is their son and he was born blind. Beyond that, ask him, he's an adult. They were afraid of being thrown out of the synagogue if they said anything even remotely admiring about Jesus. So, they passed the ball back to their son.

### **John 9:24-34 - The Second Hearing**

The Pharisees call the man back and jump all over him right from the beginning. They claim that they want to know the truth. He tells them the truth...again. They continue to badger him, and he snaps back at them that they must want to hear it again because they want to be Jesus' disciples.

At this point, they blow up. I can picture these religious leaders sputtering with rage, almost foaming at the mouth, apoplectic at this former blind beggar's impudence.

But, he's not intimidated at all. He tells them that they don't know what they're talking about. Jesus healed him. That alone is proof that he is from God. This is the first time in history that a man born blind had been given sight. This could only come from God. It's pretty obvious, really.

At which point, they go into super-apoplexy. Can you picture them turning red with steam coming out of their ears? They offer one last insult, saying he was "born entirely in sin," and throw him out.

### **John 9:35-41 - True Sight and Spiritual Blindness**

Here's my mental image of the situation: The man is sitting on steps, like the steps going up to the Supreme Court building or the Capital. He's alone. His parents are gone. His friends and neighbors (who had brought him there in the first place, thanks a lot) are gone. He's been attacked by the top dogs of his own religion. He's sitting on the steps with his head in his hands, not knowing where to turn.

Jesus finds him. He sits next to him, puts his arm around his shoulders and asks him if he believes in the Son of Man. The man is still a little tentative and asks who the Son of Man is. Jesus says that he is the one speaking to you. The man says, "Lord, I believe." He is now a disciple.

Here it gets a little tricky. Jesus goes on, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." Obviously, he isn't talking about physical sight and blindness. Even the Pharisees understand that, as they are offended by his implication that they are blind. In fact, their stubborn refusal to learn a single thing from this whole incident only solidifies their commitment to their own blindness, making it impossible for Jesus to help them.

So, what is spiritual blindness or spiritual sight? Simply put, spiritual blindness occurs when we are too sure of ourselves, too arrogant, to see God at work in ways we don't expect, quite often with people we don't like. Spiritual sight would be when we humble ourselves, recognizing that we may not be right about something we believe, so that we can see God at work in all kinds of ways, even ways that jar us out of our comfortable belief system.

Here is spiritual blindness: "I'm going to heaven. Most of my family is going to heaven. Most of my church is going to heaven. But, if you don't believe exactly what I believe, you're going to hell. Better start popping those asbestos pills." I'm pretty sure that most people who think this way, if they *do* wind up in heaven, will be shocked at who all they find there.

Here is spiritual sight: "God is love. This is much bigger than anything I can comprehend. I will do all I can to be Christ for others, and to find Christ in others, but I will leave the judgment of others to God."

Spiritual blindness will come along with a judgmental attitude. Spiritual sight comes with a humility and openness that recognizes that Christ's commandments to love God, neighbor and enemy are not for us to quibble with.

We all have spiritual blind spots. We are never 20/20 in our spiritual sight. There is always room to sharpen our vision through prayer and Bible study and worship and service. Just as soon as we believe we have achieved perfection, we are as blind as bats. May God give us the insight to recognize our own faults, and the compassion to forgive others their faults. Otherwise, we're making it very difficult for God to forgive us for our blind spots.