

Jesus heals a man born blind

Isaiah 35v1-6: The desert will rejoice, and flowers will bloom in the wastelands. ²The desert will sing and shout for joy; it will be as beautiful as the Lebanon Mountains and as fertile as the fields of Carmel and Sharon. Everyone will see the LORD's splendor, see his greatness and power. ³Give strength to hands that are tired and to knees that tremble with weakness. ⁴Tell everyone who is discouraged, "Be strong and don't be afraid! God is coming to your rescue, coming to punish your enemies." ⁵**The blind will be able to see**, and the deaf will hear. The lame will leap and dance, and those who cannot speak will shout for joy. Streams of water will flow through the desert.

John 9 v1-7; 24-34 As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been born blind. ²His disciples asked him, "Teacher, whose sin caused him to be born blind? Was it his own or his parents' sin?" ³Jesus answered, "His blindness has nothing to do with his sins or his parents' sins. He is blind so that God's power might be seen at work in him. ⁴As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵While I am in the world, I am the light for the world." ⁶After he said this, Jesus spat on the ground and made some mud with the spittle; he rubbed the mud on the man's eyes ⁷and told him, "Go and wash your face in the Pool of Siloam." (This name means "Sent.") So the man went, washed his face, and came back seeing.

²⁴A second time they called back the man who had been born blind, and said to him, "Promise before God that you will tell the truth! We know that this man who cured you is a sinner." ²⁵"I do not know if he is a sinner or not," the man replied. **"One thing I do know: I was blind, and now I see."** ²⁶"What did he do to you?" they asked. "How did he cure you of your blindness?" ²⁷"I have already told you," he answered, "and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Maybe you, too, would like to be his disciples?" ²⁸They insulted him and said, "You are that fellow's disciple; but we are Moses' disciples. ²⁹We know that God spoke to Moses; as for that fellow, however, we do not even know where he comes from!" ³⁰The man answered, "What a strange thing that is! You do not know where he comes from, but he cured me of my blindness! ³¹We know that God does not listen to sinners; he does listen to people who respect him and do what he wants them to do. ³²Since the beginning of the world nobody has ever heard of anyone giving sight to a person born blind. ³³Unless this man came from God, he would not be able to do a thing." ³⁴They answered, "You were born and brought up in sin—and you are trying to teach us?" And they expelled him from the synagogue.

1 Corinthians 13 v9-13: ⁹For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, my speech, feelings, and thinking were all those of a child; now that I am an adult, I have no more use for childish ways. ¹²**What we see now is like a dim image in a mirror**; then we shall see face-to-face. What I know now is only partial; then it will be complete—as complete as God's knowledge of me. ¹³Meanwhile these three remain: faith, hope, and love; and the greatest of these is love.

Loss of senses

Imagine that you were born totally blind and totally deaf. You have everything else; full health and mobility, your mind is intelligent and sharp, you have a very good sense of touch, taste and smell. But you have grown up seeing and hearing absolutely nothing. What would your life be like? What and how are you thinking. You have no pictures and language. It is normal for you being fed led around daily by others. Two key physical senses are missing, but you are unaware of this. Surely though you must sense in some way, that you are missing out.

Now try and translate this physical blindness and deafness into a spiritual dimension. Imagine yourself completely outside the Christian faith. You may still have some spiritual awareness, you can sense a little of the divine, perhaps when you hold your baby in your hands for the first time, or you see a breath-taking mountain sunset. Your spiritual senses are missing, but you are unaware of this. You can not believe in a God as being personal to you, and yet you can sense a vacuum. There is a void in your life that nothing in the natural realm can fill. You can try with spending sprees, with career advancement, with fame, with binge drinking, recreational drugs, social media or even chocolate, but the void is still there. In fact the harder you try to fill it, the bigger the dis-satisfaction. Something is missing from your life, but you don't know what.

Isaiah in his incredible prophecies picks up on this. There is a barrier to communication between the people and God. They know he exists but they cannot come into his presence, they cannot directly experience God. Isaiah describes this place of separation as a desert place. However, the time will come when it will be very different, streams of living water will flow into this desert. "The blind will see and the deaf will hear" (Is 35v5). The senses will come alive in Gods people, such that where there was spiritual blindness, there will be sight; where there is spiritual deafness, there will be hearing. The people of God will see Him, they will hear and recognise his voice.

The Feast of Tabernacles

About 5 months before his death, we find Jesus in Jerusalem for the Feast of the Tabernacles.

Every morning during this joyful feast, a priest would take a golden pitcher to the Pool of Siloam, filled it with water from the pool, and climbed the steps to the temple and its the altar amongst chanting of Psalms from

the crowd. This water was regarded as 'living water' because it came from a spring, and reminded the people of the time of the Exodus in the desert when Moses could strike a rock and a stream of living water would flow from it, but also of God providing the much needed rain, as the rainy season would be due to start. However, on the eighth and final day of the feast, the ritual was **not** repeated, and that was the day Jesus chose to make the shocking statement that he was the rock from which living water flowed, The water that he offers ' i.e. Holy Spirit' is the real deal not the waters drawn from the pool of Siloam. "Whoever is thirsty for God should come to me. Whoever believes in me, should drink from this life-giving water of my Spirit". (John 7v37-38) He is claiming to be Gods promised one, the Messiah.

The next day Jesus goes to the court of the Women when they had that previous night had the 'illumination of the temple festival. This involved the lighting of huge golden oil-fed menorahs that were 75 feet high and gave off enough light to illuminate Jerusalem. These were to remind the people of the pillar of light in that had let them in the desert, the Shekinah glory of God that travelled with them in the tabernacle, and that God had promised to send a messenger, that would be a light to a sinful and dark world. He stood by the oil lamps were now out but probably still smouldering, Jesus stands by them, in the Court of the women, and declares 'I am the Light of the World'. (John 8v12) Whoever follows me will have the light of life and will never walk in darkness. In other words, I am the coming messiah that brings the light that these lamp stands represent. The light is here now, stood in front of you. Don't stay in the darkness, **don't stay blind**, but look at me. I will be your light.

The crowds were impressed by Jesus, but divided. Some said 'He is a prophet', some said 'He is the Messiah (Jn 8 40-41)', but others said he was mad. He had a run in with the Religious rulers who tried to stone him, but Jesus escaped through the crowd and out the temple gates, but despite the murder attempt is seemingly wandering around just outside the gates where the beggars sat.

What causes suffering ?

They saw a young man, perhaps in his late teens, who was well known for being blind from birth, and the disciples wanted to know why? Was this a punishment for something he or his parents had done, which was a common belief. Jesus made it clear to them that he was not blind because of anything he or his parents had done. It is an important point.

God does **not** bring illness and suffering upon us. We need to hear that. It is the result of the fallen world we live in and the evil forces that come against Gods creation. They bring us down with sickness and suffering either directly, or by indirectly by leading us into bad habits, over-eating, binge drinking, recreational drugs etc. God does not punish us for doing wrong by making us ill. God is good. God is always good. God is love.

Somehow we can get this distorted image of God whereby in watching our every move, if we do too much that offends him, he is going to lash back at us in some way. So you might hear some-one say, I had a bad day and I picked up a speeding ticket. I know why. I haven't been to church for two weeks! No. Perhaps you just chose to drive your car too fast, then got caught !

You'll die because of your own sins; you will live because of your own faith. Your sin is not your parents fault or Gods fault. Parents or God did not cause this man to be blind from birth, nor did they cause my asthma, or give me 7 years of viral fatigue illness, or cause your pains, or give that cancer to your relative. God is good. God is always good. God is love. He loves you and has a perfect plan for you, which won't make much sense during suffering but looking back from eternity it will make much more sense.

Why does God allow suffering?

So here is the real question. Why did God allow the man to be blind from birth, and why does he allow our suffering. He is an almighty God, surely he can cure everyone that asks him. If we belong to him, and he lives within us and walks with us, then can't he stop us suffering? We're not so worried about the hardened criminals because we think they deserve suffering, but what about the innocent people, the child with Leukaemia and the young mum with breast cancer. It often looks so unfair.

These are the big questions, aren't they? The sort that keep many from believing in God. I suspect that they cannot be fully answered this side of heaven, but there are certainly some good pointers from scripture and from our life experiences.

There are God imposed laws to creation, so actions have consequences. I went to the funeral of a young man that had once been a popular member of my youth group. He had come home having had too much to drink, lit up a cigarette in bed, then fell asleep. He died in the fire.

God is not just good, he is big, he has all of heaven and earth to look after. He loves us personally, but we are not the only thing he is dealing with. We do not exist in a vacuum, so what changes with us impacts many others. His view of life in general, even our own lives, is not just about the now, but it's about the future too. Compared to eternity, we are here for just a few years, and **God prioritises our spiritual health over our physical health**. An immediate physical healing is not necessarily priority number 1 for God, when there can be value from our physical sufferings to our spiritual lives, or to the spiritual lives of others.

He can also use your sins and your resulting suffering, to help correct you in your ways, and there are lots of biblical examples of this.

He can also use your suffering in a constructive way to build you up, bring you closer to the Lord, and focus on those more important spiritual aspects. Our spiritual enemies, seek to destroy us, and then often can mean by trying to afflict us with poor health, but how often does that suffering drive people that have been away from God, back into prayer, back into church. In their suffering they seek God, they draw closer to him. Certainly not always, for some they blame God and it drives them further away, which is what our enemy wants. But for many, it is during a period of hardship or suffering that their faith grows, they put down deeper roots into God, and draw close to his love. God does not waste your tears, but he does **not** enjoy your suffering.

I would love to be healed from my asthma. I have been prayed for many times with no avail. I even prayed once for a girl with much worst asthma than mine, and seen her miraculously healed. But if I have to go through my whole life with asthma, because there are more important issues for God to deal with, or in some way it serves a purpose for God, then so be it.

I did recover from an awful viral fatigue illness called M.E., which I endured and fought for 7 years. Following that time, with my experience and knowledge, I found God leading me to many other M.E. sufferers and helping them in this awful time of theirs. If I hadn't suffered, I could not have helped them. Then came one of the worse days of my own life, when my own daughter was diagnosed with M.E.. But whilst it ripped my heart to see her in that way, I was so well placed to understand and help her through it. How much more difficult would it have been for both me and my daughter during that period if I had not understood the illness so well. She made a full recovery. Many don't. But, perhaps if I had not had M.E. then **she** may still have it today. Many of you too, will have been through trials and survived, then been used by God to help others in similar circumstances.

So when you are walking in the Lord with suffering, eliminate from your mind, that this is either from God or he is allowing it, in order to punish you. Instead see the allowance of suffering as part of a bigger purpose for your life or the lives of others. That doesn't mean you cannot ask for a super-natural healing, of course you can, but it does mean that you might not necessarily get it.

Blind to glorify God

For the special individual being debated by Jesus and the disciples, there was a purpose in God allowing him to be blind from birth. He is a miracle waiting to happen. Never had anyone born blind been healed. The Old Testament says that such power will only come with the promised Messiah.

Jesus does not talk to the young man and rebuke the blindness. Instead he starts by spitting on the ground. Then, just like now, that was seen as vulgar. With his spit and the dirt, he makes a bit of mud, and rubs it into the man's eyes. This gets everyone's attention. This was a Sabbath day, and making mud was counted as working by their Religious rule book and this forbidden.

He then dramatically orders the blind man to go and wash his face in the Pool of Siloam, which was close-by. Just imagine the excitement of the crowd, as they bundle this young blind man to the pool of Siloam. He was obedient, and as soon as he washed the dirt from his eyes, he could see. Wow. By sending him to the Siloam pool, he ties this miracles to the words he had said there about his Spirit being the life giving water. With this dramatic miracle he gives both sight and this new physical life to the man.

The first time ever in history, a man born blind could see. Happy Days. Surely everybody must immediately rejoice and be happy at this momentous occasion.

But the amazed are also confused about what has just happened in front of their very eyes. They go back to where Jesus had been but he is gone. The crowd want an explanation so they take the young man to the Pharisees who they mistakenly think will have an answer for what they have just witnessed.

The Interrogation

They question the man on what happened, and he tells them exactly what Jesus did. Then they ask the crowd. The Pharisees don't believe it that Jesus could have healed a man born blind. So they say he cannot have been born blind and summons his parents. They play a straight bat. He is our son and was born blind but we don't know how he now sees. So they call the young man back again, and say to him. 'Now tell us the truth, we know that this Jesus is a sinner' . Making clay or mud was work. Healing was work. You cannot do either of these things on the Sabbath day. Our rules forbid it. So this man must be a sinner, not from God.

The man replied. "I don't about this man, but one thing I do know: I was blind, and now I see."

The Pharisees won't give up. "What did he do to you? How did he cure you of your blindness?"

"I have already told you and you would not listen" the man answered getting exasperated, and then sarcastically asks "Why do you want to hear it again? Maybe you, too, would like to be his disciples?" Interesting because although as far as we know the man born blind has not seen Jesus yet, he has already made the internal decision to follow him. This simple young beggar knew his scriptures, such as Isaiah 35 v5, that only the promised Messiah could heal him of his blindness.

The learned Pharisees however cannot see this, because they are blinded by their own religion. They had taken the Jewish law of Moses and added hundreds of extra laws and interpretations, which had become a huge burden to the people.

They had bound themselves to their own rule-book. Despite seeing the physical evidence of a blind man with 20-20 vision, they could not believe this was Jesus, because they themselves were spiritually blind. Despite hearing the true witness from the man, his parents and the crowd, they could not believe what they heard, because they were spiritually deaf. They cannot see or hear the truth, no matter how loud or clear it is, because they are tied to their rule book, they cannot see or hear past their own man-made rules to what God is doing anew.

These supposedly sensible interpreters of the Jewish law, lose the plot now, and just start throwing insults at the man. Then then tell him "You are that fellow's disciple; but we are Moses' disciples. We know that God spoke to Moses; as for that fellow, however, we do not even know where he comes from!" Then the man starts lecturing them about God. "What a strange thing that is! You do not know where he comes from, but he cured me of my blindness! We know that God does not listen to sinners; he does listen to people who respect him and do what he wants them to do. Since the beginning of the world nobody has ever heard of anyone giving sight to a person born blind. Unless this man came from God, he would not be able to do a thing."

Spot on. His argument is scripturally sound and unarguable. But the Pharisees are no longer up for debating this and reply "You were born and brought up in sin and you are trying to teach us?". Then enraged with him, they throw the powers of the law, they have bestowed upon themselves, and expel him from the synagogue. To be de-synagogued means you were taken and put out of your whole culture. It wasn't just the religious centre, it was the political and social centre too. If you were de-synagogued, your community could not employ you, sell you food, friends cannot visit you, doctors can not treat you. You are shunned, ignored, and set aside by your community.

Jesus finds the young man

The young man had his sight back, which was an incredible joy, but had lost his way of making money as a blind beggar, and now had no chance of further employment or support. What a mixed day for him. When Jesus heard what had happened to this young man, he found him and asked him if he believed in 'the Son of Man'. The young man replies that he wants to believe in him, and Jesus said it was himself. The man kneels down in front of Jesus and says 'I believe Lord'. Then Jesus declares..

'I came to this world to judge, so that the blind should see, and those think they see, that they are blind'. The judgement of Jesus is restoring what is good and right in Gods eyes to its proper place. Jesus is saying that he is not only come to perform signs such as giving physical sight to the blind, but also bring light to those that think they see, but are actually walking in darkness, like the religious leaders of his day.

Live extra-ordinary lives.

Three weeks ago, I wanted to sit down and start working on this talk, but I had a headache, so I went to my gym for a swim first. At the pool, I met a man, that I had known for over 30 years, who had been an

internationally acclaimed Classical Guitarist. He had now had a stroke, and after 3 years could still not play again. I was prompted by the Spirit, to invite him out for coffee, which he readily accepted. We soon got onto the topic of faith and why some like me believed in God, and others like Him did not. He suggested that I now had a strong faith, that I had it all sewn up, and no longer needed to ask any-more questions. I disagreed with him, and explained that I had never stopped asking questions. Yes I believe in God, and I believe his Word through the Bible is the truth. What I don't believe is that my interpretation of what I have experienced and what I have read is always right. I don't align myself with those who feel that their interpretation of the Gospel, must be right, and everyone else must therefore be wrong. They have tied God to set of rules based on their own personal experience to date, and are not open to new revelation, much in the same way as the Pharisees weren't.

I told my friend, that my faith was a journey and not a destination, a journey that I hope will never finish, in this world or the next, and I want to make the most of each day and keep learning more about God. We agreed that every day was a precious gift, and I mentioned the film 'Dead Poets society' which he said he also loved.

On the first day of classes in a new term, the students are surprised by the unorthodox teaching methods of the new English teacher John Keating, who encourages his students to "make your lives extraordinary", a sentiment he summarizes with the Latin expression *carpe diem*, meaning "seize the day." I said to my friend – Carpe day-um, and he corrected me to 'Carpe dee-um'. He said the way I pronounced it meant 'Seize God' and the other is 'Seize the Day'. Then we both stopped talking and looked at each other, as if we were both having this light-bulb moment. Could that be what it really means to 'Seize the day' ? That is to 'seize a little bit more of God', to seek more of Him each day, to grow in our understanding, to see a little more through our spiritual eyes? Carpe Dee-um; Carpe Day-um. If we do that, then we can make our lives extra-ordinary.

See in part

Paul writing to the Corinthians, talks about this journey of increasing spiritual sight and awareness [1 Corinthians 13 v 9-13]. As we start out, he says that we say, what we feel, and what we think, and therefore what we say, about God are childish. We are baby Christians. But as we mature in our faith, and experience more of Jesus through his Holy Spirit, then we have no more use for those childish ways. So this means that our feelings, our thoughts and therefore what we say is more mature, it has a better grasp of God, and how to live out this Christian life to the full which Jesus offers to us. But in the same passage Paul says that we know in part, and we prophecy in part. What we see now is like a dim image in a mirror. So it is better than it was, but we are still seeing only part of Gods revelation to us, there is still so much detail missing.

Isaiah, He had some experience of God, but knew there was more. Man's experience of God would be greatly increased by the Messiah.

We have some experience of God, but must know that there is more. Our experience of God can be greatly increased by Jesus and His Spirit, by keeping our minds open to them.

What is holding you back today?

Have you been blaming God for your own suffering, or for the suffering of others you know. Then you must let it go. God is good. God is always good. God is love.

Are you upset for God allowing you or you loved ones to suffer. Try and see the bigger picture. Whilst we can pray for miracles, our spiritual health is more important to God that our physical health, and our suffering may be used to bring ourselves or others closer to God.

Have you become trapped in your own certainties, satisfied in a dimmed light? Are you tied to your own rule book, based on your own experiences to date, trapped by your won buzzing certainties of what God can and can't do in your life and the life of others. Realise that you hear in part, and see in part. Be open to new experiences of God. Go deeper. Seize the day by seizing more of God. Carpe Day-um, Carpe Dee-um. Live an extra-ordinary life.

Amen.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HmlbQZgAcos>