

May 12, 2019

John 9

"Living in the Light"

We've spent three weeks on chapter 9. Primarily because there's so much here. Plus it's at a pivot point where Jesus is ending his public ministry. In the healing of the man blind since birth, which takes up the whole chapter, we've seen two things that keep us in spiritual darkness:

- Doubt.
- Manmade rules.

The third thing that keeps us from seeing spiritually is fear. We see that in

John 9:18-23:

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" His parents answered, "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." (His parents said these things because they feared the Jews,

for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.} Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

That is the response of people who are afraid. What do you hear in their response? First, they kind of throw their son under the bus. They know how he was healed and who healed him. Common sense tells us *how could they not?* Come on, man. You know. You know. But they were afraid.

Fear keeps us in the dark. The man's parents were afraid because of the very real threat of being put out of the synagogue. That was a frightening prospect. The synagogue was essential to community life. It represented business opportunities. It was social welfare. It was social security. To be put out of the synagogue meant you had no foundation or safety net in your old age. It was a real threat of communal devastation. His parents were afraid.

Their fear was real. It wasn't same made-up, things-go-bump-in-the-night

kind of fear. They feared some devastating realities. How do you face fear that's real? How do you overcome spiritual blindness?

Here's the hardest, simplest answer. We best face our fears when we are willing to lose it all for Jesus Christ. As I like to say, *what doesn't kill you makes you stronger...and if it kills you, you will be in the eternal presence of Jesus*. Paul puts it in a more eloquent way:

"For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

The closer we get to that, the more sense it makes. If I'm willing to lose it all for Jesus Christ I don't have to be afraid of anything in the world. That's why we weren't afraid to walk into the unknown and form Covenant Church 7 years ago. Every now and then, we may be a little nervous, initially, when it looks like things are going south, but we don't have to be afraid because **no one can take anything from us that's of any lasting and eternal value**. I hope that makes sense to you. Do you believe heaven is real? Do you believe one day you will be with Jesus forever? Fear may be a momentary thing, but when you are grounded in Christ it won't break you or destroy you or control your life.

The blind man's parents feared the things they would lose. But none of those things last forever. That's why Jesus said, in Luke 9, to daily take up our cross and deny ourselves and follow him. He commanded us to do that. Jesus knew the grip fear could hold on our lives. So he told us to be willing to let it go. Fear can haunt our lives. But when we're walking with Jesus, fear becomes like a vapor.

Do you have any fears? What are your fears? I'm not talking about healthy fears. It's not bad to be a little afraid of snakes or fire or what's down in a dark basement. There's healthy fear. But most others things...fear of growing old or dying or losing material things...those are the kinds of fears that mess with our minds and get in the way of our relationship with God. Trusting Jesus Christ, we've got to let go of our fears. We're going to hold loosely to things of this world. Step-by-step, loosen your grip on things of this world. Give them less power of your life. Remember, the things of Christ are of the greatest value for you.

Here's another simple answer. What's the answer to fear? Trusting Jesus Christ. And putting him above the things of this world. The parents of the

blind man were afraid of the religious leaders. They were afraid of the things they could lose. And so they denied the truth.

That is the power of fear. They denied their own son. And they weren't honest about the great thing that had happened in his life.

We lose our fear and gain spiritual sight when we see Jesus in our circumstances.

So far we have seen several conversations going on. The Pharisees talk to the man. Then they talk to his parents. Then they talk to the man again. When the Pharisees talked to the parents, by their fear, we saw how the Pharisees were in control. But that didn't happen to the man who was healed. He's in control. The Pharisees try to intimidate him. They say, "Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner." And the man gives one of the best answers to an intimidating question you're ever going to see:

Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see...I have told you already, and you would not listen.

Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples?

- John 9:24-27

His answer is so simple and clear.

Do you recognize the phrasing of verse 25? Right...John Newton used it when he wrote "Amazing Grace."

Now listen. There's something instructive about the story behind "Amazing Grace." Some of us know the basics of the story. But there's more complexity. We resonate with Newton's confession that he was blind but now he sees. In his case, that spiritual journey took a longer route. For some of us, losing our spiritual blindness is a longer process. That's not a bad thing or a good thing. It's just the way it is, sometimes.

The real story behind "Amazing Grace" is instructive.

In the 1700s, John Newton was captain of a slave ship. During one voyage, a violent storm almost sank a ship he was on. He prayed to God. The ship drifted to safety. He took that as a sign from God. He marked that moment as his conversion to Christianity. But here's the part of the story most of us don't know. He did not radically change his ways at once. His total

reformation was gradual. Looking back on his life, he wrote, "I cannot consider myself to have been a believer in the full sense of the word, until a considerable time afterward." He did begin to read the Bible and slowly began to view his role in the slave trade through that lens.

Even after his conversion, Newton made three more voyages as captain of two different slave ships. In 1754, he suffered a stroke. While he was no longer able to captain a ship, Newton continued to invest in the business. He was ordained as an Anglican priest in 1764. He wrote 100s of hymns, including "Amazing Grace" in 1772.

Finally, in 1788, John Newton renounced the slave trade with the publication of a pamphlet titled "Thoughts Upon the Slave Trade." He said, "It will always be a subject of humiliating reflection to me, that I was once an active instrument in a business at which my heart now shudders." That pamphlet grew in popularity. It was sent to every member of Parliament. In 1807, under the leadership of William Wilberforce, slavery was outlawed in Great Britain. Newton lived to see it, dying later that year.

Spiritual blindness is a powerful thing. Fear can hold us back from seeing what we need to see. If anything, I want you to be encouraged in your spiritual journey from fear to faith. Things don't have to happen overnight. Don't ever grow discouraged if the process is slow or if you suffer setbacks. Simply trust that God is working to refine you. He will make you a different and a better person. We were blind, but now we see.

Consider the progression the healed blind man goes through:

- Verse 11: *The man called Jesus.*
- Verse 17: *He is a prophet.*
- Verse 38: *Lord, I believe.*

From man to prophet to Lord. It was a process. He moved from fear to trust to enlightenment to commitment.

Wherever you are at in the process, trust the One who opened your eyes. You are going to grow in your relationship with Jesus. It's an amazing thing to trust in Christ and Christ alone. Some have called it amazing grace for this life and the next.

Let's pray:

Lord Jesus Christ, without you I am spiritually blind. I admit how much I need you. Help me to see spiritually. Lord Jesus Christ, I want to see you more clearly. You have the power to remove all fear. Thank you for being patient with me as I grow in my walk with you. Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for helping me. I once was blind, but now I see. Amen.