

Open Your Eyes

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[0 : 0 0] in the church bibles some time ago in St. Silas we were in a series in John's gospel we got to the end of chapter 8 we're just picking up John chapter 9 here and if you'd find it helpful there's an outline inside the new look notice sheets there it's my custom to pray so that we ask for God's help as we turn to his word so let's bow our heads and I'll lead us in a prayer heavenly father creator of light and love we recognize that without your help we are in the dark about you we ask that you will give us eyes to see you this morning clear heads to understand and hearts that respond rightly to who you are for we ask in Jesus name amen so we're looking at this event from John's account of Jesus life and in John's gospel John was an eyewitness a close follower of Jesus and he records seven signs for us he says Jesus did a lot more than I can record at the end of the gospel but he says that here he's in effect saying here are seven signs seven acts of supernatural power in Jesus life that are not just described as miracles they're signs because they signal to us who Jesus is and John has this connection running through his book between evidence and belief and life so he's saying that here's some signs so that you can believe who Jesus is because Jesus said if you believe in him he will give you eternal life as we heard Dan describing that when he first heard that promise earlier on so by trusting in Jesus we get this gift of life knowing God now that can go on forever beyond beyond the grave after we die now here in John chapter 9 is the sixth one of Jesus seven John seven signs that Jesus did and we meet this man who has never known what it's like to be able to see all through his life in terms of physical sight he has been in darkness but even though the sign is about physical blindness the whole chapter is actually about spiritual blindness the first thing that jumps out at us is the disciples question so my first point there the confusion of the disciples they're Jesus followers they see this blind man begging they turn to

Jesus they say verse 2 rabbi teacher who sinned this man or his parents that he was born blind now sin is the bible's word for our rejection of God it's not just the bad things we do it might be that there are good things we do but we don't do them for God and as we turn in our hearts away from God that's sin and the disciples here are making a connection between suffering and sin the thing is that their connection they want to make is between a particular instance of suffering and they're looking for specific sin that caused it now why would they think that partly because the bible makes clear for us that the reason there is suffering in our world is because there is sin in our world people sometimes look at our world don't we and we think how can it be so broken we might even think how can there be a good God and things be this broken the answer from Jesus is it's because sin came into our world that is that one aspect of the human condition is that we have all turned away from God and as the first human beings did that we got the world we deserve suffering came into our world so when we see bad things around us happening we've just been praying for those haven't we as Alan led us in some of those things it is a reminder to us that something has gone really wrong between us and the good generous God of all of this and we need someone to put that right what's gone wrong between us and the God of all this so the connection between sin and suffering is generally true it's true in general across the world but it's not specifically true and the disciples mistake is to connect a specific example of suffering the man's blindness with specific sin who sinned that this man would be born blind and we might think we wouldn't be so crass in 21st century Glasgow as to to to think something so unkind or so superstitious but we do have a similar kind of thinking today maybe not about sickness but about other things it's the thinking that says when you look at the world what goes around comes around people essentially get what they deserve in life if you've ever seen the movie the sound of music I've got daughters we watched that film when Maria and the cap I mean it's good for boys as well okay the film but I hadn't seen it when Maria and the captain get together it's a great moment and they sing a song and it oozes this mentality so they they found each other they've fallen in love they're happy and they sing nothing

comes from nothing nothing ever could so somewhere in my youth or childhood I must have done something good if we think like that if we think what goes around comes around in life when we see someone living the good life we think they must deserve it if someone's in chaos we think what have they done wrong they're to blame for that sort themselves out and what it leads to in ourselves that mentality is if things are going well for you you become a very proud person and you become a selfish person because you think I deserve this I don't have to share it with anyone this is because I made the right calls and other people who don't have this they're responsible for that so you lack compassion for others you think that's their fault it's not my problem and if things are going badly for you in a society where people around you think like this then you don't just have to endure the suffering you're going through and the lack of sympathy of others for that you also have to feel shame you feel it's my fault people think it's my fault that

I'm going through this as people look at you and think it is your fault and so what Jesus says here in verse 3 is of incredible comfort it's been of incredible comfort to many people ever since Jesus said it have a look at verse 3 neither this man nor his parents sinned said Jesus but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him there might well be situations in our life where we could look at personal suffering and have to admit that is my fault the reason I'm going through this now is because of something I did but in general when we encounter suffering this is a really important message from Jesus it's unspeakably comforting that we would think there is no shame in the suffering that I'm going through it is not my fault that this is happening and more than that if we'll turn to God in our suffering what was true for this man in John chapter 9 could be true for us that when there is suffering in our life God can do something in us that displays his goodness and his work it might not be physical healing has happened to this man for us but it could be some kind of transformation in us some good work that God works in us and through us that displays his goodness and love as he helps us in our suffering I was reading this week about a woman's personal story of how she became a Christian as a teenager she said God met her in these words of Jesus John chapter 9 verse 3 she had a disability she struggled to walk and she describes how at school she was mocked bullied she wouldn't tell her parents when she got home how she was pushed over on the way home by people as they bullied her if there was a God she was raging at him and then she heard these words in John chapter 9 and she found in John chapter 9 verse 3 a God who has purposes for her and a future for her because he is able and willing to display his good work in her life if she trusts him and that's what she's found ever since in great joy to her that by coming to Jesus who doesn't condemn but displays his good works in people who trust him even as they endure suffering she's found a great God to know so that's our first point the confusion of the disciples but how do we know that God could do that that he could display good work in our lives our second point is the testimony of the blind man in verse 6 Jesus makes mud wet with his saliva and he puts it on the man's eyes as if to emphasize the blindness apart from that we don't really know why Jesus did it but he did do it so John tells us that he did it and the man goes and he washes in a certain pool that Jesus sends him to with a significant meaning and as the dirt comes away from his eyes for the first time in his life he can see the whole event is summarized perfectly over the page in verse 32 if you just look there he says nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind the only way for this to happen is if there is a God and he has stepped into our world in the person of Jesus from beyond our universe so it's a long chapter isn't it as Katrina read it so well for us if there are witness after witness examined and cross-examined the man's neighbors the man's parents the man himself and as time goes on we find the once blind man starts to interpret the sign correctly so in verse 12 he says he doesn't know anything about the man who did it he doesn't know where he is but then in verse 17 the religious

leaders interrogate him and they say that the pharisees the religious leaders in verse 17 what have you to say about him it was your eyes he opened the man replies he's a prophet he's working it out and then in verse 25 whether he is a sinner or not I don't know one thing I do know I was blind but now I see and then if you look at verse 38 the man says as Jesus has found him he says Lord I believe and he worshiped him now there's a man who can really see by the end of the chapter so then the focus the spotlight turns to the religious leaders the pharisees what will they do with the testimony of the man who was born blind and the answer is it will reveal that they are spiritually blind we're used to the picture aren't we of blindness and seeing like that in other areas of life so Jeremy Clarkson publicly known for being a bit of a climate change denier pouring scorn on eco warriors you know driving big heavy inefficient cars unashamedly he once said this I have a disregard for the environment I think the world can look after itself and we should enjoy it as best we

can then he was on a boat trip recently on one of his tv shows in Vietnam and he got to a lake that had dried up so they couldn't get through it and he says it has changed his mind about climate change has the evidence the available evidence significantly changed for Jeremy Clarkson not really it's just that he had an experience that suddenly made it all sink in for him we'd say wouldn't we it was an eye-opener for Jeremy Clarkson a similar example the Australian cricket captain was saying just recently how as a such an elite cricketer an elite sportsman his whole world was just about sport but the Australian bushfires going on while they're trying to play cricket really has opened his eyes to what's really going on in the world what really matters he was he was blind he was blinded by the focus in his life on sport and now he can see more clearly what's going on that's the kind of idea the issue that John chapter 9 confronts us with is could we have the same kind of blindness ourselves even as a whole culture or as an individual when it comes to the realities about God and about us when it comes to God so let's pick things up in verse 28 as the Pharisees respond to the blind man's testimony verse 28 they hurl insults at him and they say you are this fellow's disciple I look at the word fellow no one would use that now would they it's like you are this guy's disciple you're this guy's disciple we're disciples of Moses we know that God spoke to Moses but as for this guy we don't even know where he comes from and the man says now that is remarkable you don't know where he comes from enlightened ones yet he opened my eyes so in verse 34 their response to that challenge is you were steeped in sin at birth how dare you lecture us and they throw him out now by the time they say that just think about that they are admitting that the miracle took place they are their worldview is the same as the disciples had before chapter 9 verse 3 they think if you were born blind it would reveal to us that you had some sort of sin from your birth so when they say you were steeped in sin at birth they're admitting the man in front of them is the man who was born blind and now he can see but their response to that is to banish the man to throw away the evidence now why do they react like that that's our third point we'll spend some time on the spiritual blindness of the Pharisees the blindness of the Pharisees why are they blind it's because they've already made their mind up about Jesus that's the key and we see that in the question that they asked the man's parents I'm jumping around a bit but if you look at verse 22 as they interrogate the parents and they the parents say go and ask this our son yourself and in verse 22 John says his parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue they've committed themselves already they've made their minds up they're not going to accept that Jesus is the Messiah that's the one that the scriptures promised who will come into our world from God to rescue us they've already decided anyone who says that about Jesus will throw them out and that makes it a culpable blindness it's a blindness that is their fault a few years ago the journalist Margaret Heffernan wrote the book willful blindness you might have read it she was explaining why it is in our world that there is this phenomenon that crimes can go unnoticed even when when you look back you can see that things were happening right in front of people's faces the the Weinstein situation the me too campaign that stuff going on in Hollywood the trial at the moment people look back and say suddenly as soon as the story broke I could see we could we should have seen it for years that it was going on the Jimmy Savile situation the people who'd come forward and being ignored why were they ignored after the event people say you know looking back it's obvious now there were all these warning signs why did people not act on it she says Heffernan there's a deep psychological problem in these situations when we deeply don't want something to be true we bias ourselves against the evidence as facts are presented to us she said it happens in the science world as well where you'll find that there's a there's a there's new medical research that reveals that something that doctors have been doing is wrong and it gets covered up for years often because there's this subconscious reluctance that's so deep to admit that the way that we've been doing things is wrong and so we're more skeptical than we ought to be of the evidence willful blindness willful blindness was Heffernan's book now John shows that it's that kind of willful blindness in the religious leaders it's a moral choice by them to stick with their position in the face of the evidence why were they so determined to reject Jesus well partly it's because the Pharisees were blind to their own sin they were proud and Jesus teach teaching offended them what Jesus says about the human condition is very confronting it's especially confronting if you think that you are a good person an enlightened person for Jesus says that by our own good works and by our own perhaps our own religious works we cannot save ourselves from our sin that the church leader or the bishop or the pope need to save you just as much as the the imprisoned convict the Pharisees here as religious people thought

that sin was something other people did and not them they thought they were spiritually enlightened and we see that in the assumption that's behind what they say to the man in verse 34 when they say you were steeped in sin at birth how dare you lecture us what are they assuming you were steeped in sin not me there's a self-righteousness there's a blindness to their own need for a rescuer

[18 : 28] and that's why they're set against Jesus no matter how strong the evidence is about him so how do we learn from them well first what John wants us to do is to understand that as a reason why people would reject Jesus so that we're not put off drawing the conclusion that Jesus is who he claimed to be when other people around us don't believe it if you're here this morning would you let me encourage you to look at Jesus and follow the evidence about him where it leads and not to be put off when seemingly smart sensible people around you don't do the same it might not actually be about evidence it's often not about evidence that people are not Christians it could be about spiritual blindness but a question to ask ourselves is would it be possible for me to fall into the same kind of trap have I become close-minded when it comes to the evidence about Jesus because I think it's striking when you look at the Pharisees here how much in our culture we see people rejecting Jesus in the same kind of ways around us maybe you see that among your classmates at school or at university or your colleagues or your family or friends people have already made their mind up about Jesus without really looking at the evidence properly sometimes perhaps even in the face of the evidence and I remember saying to a friend

I had a friend who did a theology degree at university I didn't do theology and after university I became a Christian and had a good chat with him one day but he was adamantly not a Christian he'd done this theology degree and I said to him what do you make of the evidence that Jesus rose from the dead?

the thing that's persuaded me to be a Christian is this evidence that I find historically so compelling that Jesus rose from the dead after he died in that he was seen alive again the tomb was empty and my friend said to me after all that learning and that theology degree he said to me Martin, Jesus didn't rise from the dead because people can't rise from the dead so you see what's going on there he's ruling out the evidence because it doesn't agree with his conclusion that he's already made and the Pharisees' problem here is they are blind to their own sin they were too convinced they were spiritually enlightened so deep down it confronted them that Jesus taught that they needed to be to have their eyes opened and again don't we see that all around us today when it comes to our nation and the people around us and what we think of the Christian faith when our society hears the claim that we're all sinners who need a saviour how do people react to that label in our society? outrage disdain mockery we think we're the enlightened ones now in 21st century Scotland we've arrived how dare the 1st century Jesus lecture us how dare Jesus suggest that on my own I'm spiritually helpless we're confronted aren't we we don't like that around the people around us so then the challenge for each of us from John chapter 9 is it's about humility isn't it?

teachability would we have the humility to accept the possibility that without God's help I am spiritually blind it's a key step towards knowing God of course you might sincerely feel that you do want to look at more evidence and that's great we can talk about evidence we've got Christianity Explored running tonight 7.45 in the hall we'll see you there I hope you can join us but when it comes to spiritual things about who God is and how we know him what we're seeing in John chapter 9 here is spiritual blindness is a real problem and the problem runs even deeper than that because one of the problems with spiritual blindness is you can't see it you can't see the problem Jesus says in verse 41 of the Pharisees if you were blind you would not be guilty of sin but now that you claim you can see your guilt remains it's the problem is that the spiritual blindness is a problem so big you can't see it and if you don't think you've got a problem you don't you don't go for help the physically blind man knew he was blind he knew he needed to see the spiritually blind have not recognised their problem but if we do have the humility to admit our need for help to see the truth about God we can get that help and maybe we need to hear that if we've been a Christian many years maybe you're someone who is struggling you've got struggles to believe you've got struggles to keep going and we need to acknowledge that one of the key places we need to go is to recognise if I need help to see where do I go

[23 : 53] I go to God I turn to him that's the great news of John chapter 9 if you look at verse 39 Jesus said to the man who was blind who can see now for judgement I've come into this world that is a sifting effect so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind that is those who

think they can see spiritually their blindness will be exposed as they come to Jesus but the blind will be able to see Jesus could give the blind man sight because he knew he was blind and in verse 5 he said this he said to the disciples while I'm in the world I am the light of the world he can give us light in the darkness there's a letter in the New Testament by the Apostle Paul an early Christian leader he says it he says this in 2 Corinthians 4 he says God who said let light shine out of the darkness made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ he's saying that it's God who can give light and he opened our eyes spiritually that when we come to Jesus and we ask him for sight

God can enlighten our hearts so that when we see Jesus Christ we see him for who he really is all of God's brilliance on display in him and Jesus stands ready to offer us that sight what do you think of verse 35 just have a look at that Jesus heard that they'd thrown him out and when he found him he said do you believe in the son of man this is a man thrown out of the religious community and Jesus pursues him just as I believe he pursues people like you and me today and for Jesus to do that to stand outside with the rejected ultimately he gets rejected himself as John's gospel unfolds we see that he is rejected and needs to go to the cross and at the cross he endures darkness so that he can offer us spiritual light it was immensely costly for us to seek us out but he does that because he loves us and personally for me

I can say this makes sense of my experience that when I did a course like Christianity explored some years ago looking into the Christian faith I thought I was looking in at Jesus looking back it was as though one day God opened my eyes to who Jesus is and it was as though up to that point in my life as I look back now I feel as though I'd only seen the world in black and white and then since then I can see things in colour knowing God knowing his love knowing who I am knowing who I belong to all because of his kindness so what would it look like to ask Jesus yourself for spiritual sight well it might be a prayer that just admits before Jesus your own unbelief today and asks him Jesus if you are there would you open my eyes I want to see you as well as praying like that you could come back as Sunday by Sunday we ask for God's help and we open up the Bible to see Jesus more clearly and to see ourselves in his world in his light you could come tonight to Christianity Explore that would be a great thing to do let me pray for us let's pray the man answered one thing I do know

I was blind but now I see gracious and loving heavenly father and mighty God we thank you that Jesus gives sight to the blind we come before you in humility accepting that like the man born blind here we need help to see we need your help to see you and to see ourselves in truth and Lord we want to see open our eyes we pray shine light into our hearts that we might know you as we see your glory in the face of Jesus Christ we ask in your mercy and because of your great love for us in Jesus name Amen