

John 9.1-7: Missions, Blindness, & Grace

❖ Scene 1: Blindness Encounters the Missionary

- ▶ Main characters:
 - ▶ The Missionary: Jesus
 - ▶ The man blind from birth
- ▶ Supporting cast:
 - ▶ The disciples
- ▶ Theme: Blind judgment and grace

- ▶ Blindness is at the heart of everyone's spiritual condition— *The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Corinthians 4.4).*
- ▶ A primary ministry of the Messiah was prophesied to be the opening of blind eyes— *“Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him . . . to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness (Isaiah 42.1, 7).*
- ▶ The purpose of missions and the work of missionaries is to open blind eyes. (*The word missionary means “one who is sent”.*) Jesus, the “Sent One” (John 5.23; 6.28; etc.), announced his ministry with the words of Isaiah: *“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind . . .” Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4.18, 21).*
- ▶ Tragically, missionaries can be blinded by cultural biases and theological misconceptions.

The Missionary and the Blind Man

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth.

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- ❖ The Missionary (“the Sent-One”) has “eyes” for hurting, needy people.

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Matthew 9.36

On hearing this, Jesus said to them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Mark 2.17

- ❖ The man “blind from birth”

- ▶ Note, there is no record of the healing of the blind in the Old Testament, or by the apostles in the New Testament. Giving sight to the blind was a distinguishing ministry of the Messiah (cf. Isaiah 29.18; 32.3; 35.5; 42.7).

- ▶ Divine intervention is required to open spiritually blinded eyes (cf. 2 Corinthians 4.6).
- ▶ The dilemma of blindness: “born blind” is our story—and the story of everyone who has ever lived—and the condition of anyone who lives apart from Christ. (cf. Revelation 3.17)

“If we reflect, then, on what is signified by the deed here done, that blind man is the human race; for this blindness had [taken] place in the first man through sin, from whom we all draw our origin, not only in respect of death, but also of unrighteousness. For if unbelief is blindness, and faith enlightenment, whom did Christ find a believer at His coming?”

—Augustine

An Un-Missionary Judgment

“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

- ❖ The dilemma of blindness: blind judgment
 - ▶ We have a compulsive need to find an explanation for everything that does not seem right.
 - ▶ An even darker streak is within us: our need to assign guilt and blame.
 - ▶ The response of Jesus is a warning to us not to be presumptuous in our theology.
- ❖ Many “why” questions have no adequate, let alone, divinely accurate answers. Jesus did not get an answer to his “why” question as he hung on the cross—but his trust was validated.
- ❖ We rob God of His sovereignty and people of trusting Him and relying on His grace when we try from our limited perspective to explain His purposes.
- ❖ Our mission is not to explain problems, but to bring people into the purposes of God.

The Missionary Perspective

“Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.”

- ❖ Jesus’ explanation: “This man was born blind, not because of sin, but for the display of God’s glory in his life.”

- ▶ Some things do not happen because of a bad past; others do, but even that cause is secondary to the good purpose and future that God is pursuing (*cf. Romans 8.28-29*).

But Joseph said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

Genesis 50.19-20

- ❖ This man’s healing and subsequent testimony became community knowledge and a witness to the grace of God and the work of Jesus as the Messiah who came both to redeem and heal and to judge in righteousness.

The Missionary Mandate

“As long as it is day, we must do the works of Him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

- ❖ We *must* do the works of Him who sent Jesus. Every Christ-follower is part of Jesus’ God-sent mission, a mission that must be our top priority, regardless of our role in the church or our work in life.
- ❖ We must be urgent about the work. There is a time limit: to our longevity, to the lifespan of unbelievers, and to the age of grace. *“Hurry! Get going! The night is coming!”*
- ❖ The absence of Christ is darkness. He is the Light of the world; we are (His) light in the world (cf. Matthew 5.16).

Christ still irradiates the world, but He works just as hard now through His ministry of people as He did through His ministry in the flesh.

—John Calvin

Missionary Ministry

“After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent”). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.”

- ❖ Here is the heart of ministry and the mission for which God sent His Son: GRACE. The main issue was healing, not “who sinned?”. Furthermore, Jesus did not ask the man if he wanted to be healed; grace took the initiative for the man’s healing—as well as for us, also born blind.

But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. . . . For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!

Romans 5.8, 15

- ❖ The word “eyes” appears 9 times in this chapter. John, writing his gospel as an evangelist to bring his readers to faith in Christ, uses “eyes” each time with its pronoun outside of its natural order in the Greek language. “It is as though John is saying to his readers: ‘He smeared mud on the blind man’s eyes; reader, what about your eyes? Have they been touched?’” (F. D. Brunner)

- ❖ The “Sent One” sent the blind man to wash in the Pool of Siloam, the pool where the water was drawn for the Water Ceremony during the Feast of Tabernacles—during which Jesus proclaimed himself to be the fulfillment of all that was being commemorated: the water that gives life and the light of the world (John 7 & 8). The man came back seeing! Sent by the Missionary, he came back as a missionary. Transformed by grace, he testified for Christ. Our blinded eyes have been opened by Jesus and we have that same missionary calling, “the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace” (Acts 20.24).

“Every new convert, and so every candidate for baptism, is asked first to go wash in the pool of Christ the Missionary, and then to come back, healed, cleansed, and empowered to do — as the Blind Man will now do for the remainder of this chapter in his own community — the work of Christ the Missionary.”

—F. D. Brunner